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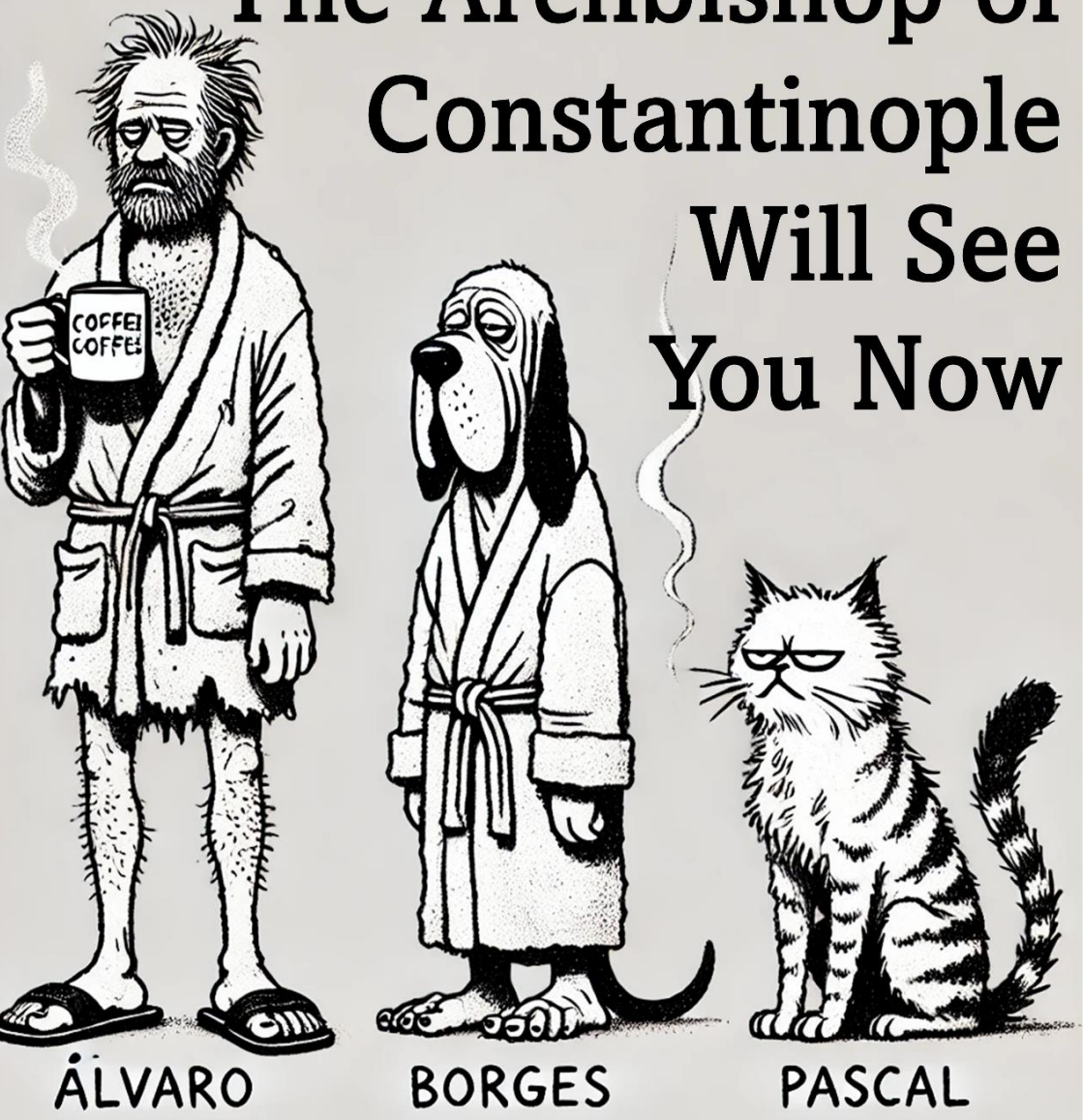
The Archbishop of Constantinople Will See You Now



THE ARCHBISHOP OF CONSTANTINOPLE WILL SEE YOU NOW

By Alba Pratalia

Álvaro Diderot sat on his porch, wrapped in his old, tattered robe, sipping black coffee from an ancient, chipped mug. The morning was crisp, the air smelled faintly of damp earth and forgotten autumn, and Borges, the dog, lay sprawled at his feet, lazily watching the world with half-closed eyes. Pascal, the cat, ever dignified, perched on the railing, tail flicking in judgment.

From the distance, a mailman approached. Álvaro had never seen this one before—young, fresh-faced, too eager for his own good. He walked with purpose, clutching a small stack of envelopes and parcels, scanning the houses as he went.

As he reached Álvaro's gate, the mailman hesitated. He looked left, then right. His gaze

swept over the porch, the peeling paint, the overgrown garden, and then he frowned, puzzled.

No mailbox.

He shifted on his feet, double-checked his delivery slip, then searched again, perhaps hoping one would materialize if he stared hard enough. Finding nothing, he adjusted his cap, straightened his spine, and, in a final act of defeated professionalism, gave Álvaro a polite nod.

"Good morning, sir," he said.

Álvaro took a slow sip of coffee, meeting the young man's gaze with a look that might have been curiosity or mild amusement.

The mailman hesitated another second, then—uncertain but unwilling to stand around any longer—turned on his heel and walked away, the letters still in hand.

Borges exhaled a long sigh. Pascal flicked his tail, unimpressed.

Álvaro took another sip of coffee and watched the mailman retreat down the road, still clutching whatever doomed correspondence had been meant for him. He took another slow sip of coffee, then turned his gaze downward to Borges, who was sprawled at his feet, and Pascal, who remained perched on the railing like a disdainful gargoyle.

"Have we ever had a mailman?" Álvaro asked, genuinely curious.

Borges, lifting his head just enough to acknowledge the question, yawned. "Not that I recall."

Pascal, ever unimpressed, flicked his tail. "Mail implies communication. You barely tolerate speaking to the people who show up uninvited, let alone corresponding with those at a distance."

Álvaro considered this. "Fair." He took another sip of coffee. "But that doesn't explain why they keep trying."

Borges sighed, stretching his front legs. "Hope is a powerful thing, Álvaro."

Pascal sneered. "So is bureaucracy."

Álvaro exhaled through his nose. "That poor bastard was doomed the moment he put on the uniform, wasn't he?"

Borges flopped onto his side. "He'll learn."

Pascal groomed a paw. "Or he won't. Either way, not our problem."

Álvaro stared at the retreating figure of the mailman. Then, with a sigh, he reached for his whiskey bottle, poured a splash into his coffee, and muttered, "Maybe I should put up a mailbox. Just to see what happens."

Pascal stopped mid-lick, horrified. "Why would you invite that kind of chaos into our lives?"

Borges simply wagged his tail. "Might be entertaining."

Álvaro leaned back in his chair, watching the world settle around him. The mailman was gone. The sun was rising. His coffee was warm.

"Eh," he muttered. "We'll see."

Álvaro swirled his coffee, watching the rising steam as he pondered his own question. "Does physical mail even still exist? Like, with envelopes and stamps?" He frowned. "When did we last receive one?"

Borges lifted his head slightly, giving him a dubious look. "Define 'receive.' If you mean in the sense of someone successfully delivering it to you, I don’t think it has ever happened."

Pascal stretched lazily. "The last envelope I remember was that eviction notice. You set it on fire before even opening it."

Álvaro nodded slowly. "Ah, yes. But that doesn’t count. That was taped to the door, not delivered by a mailman."

Borges let out a thoughtful huff. "There was that time the neighbor accidentally got your letter and brought it over."

Álvaro snapped his fingers. "Right! From the university! Asking if I was still alive."

Pascal scoffed. "And you considered that an existential question rather than a bureaucratic one."

Álvaro smirked. "Same thing, really." He sipped his coffee, then sighed. "But honestly, who even sends letters anymore?"

Borges rolled onto his back, paws in the air. "People who don't trust digital communication."

Pascal yawned. "Paranoid old men."

Álvaro raised an eyebrow. "Hey, I resemble that remark."

Pascal twitched an ear. "You barely resemble a functioning adult."

Álvaro ignored the insult, drumming his fingers against his mug. "Maybe I should send a letter, just to see if it still works."

Borges let out a low chuckle. "Who would you even write to?"

Álvaro thought for a moment. "The Pope. Just to see if he responds."

Pascal sighed. "I hate that this is a real possibility now."

Álvaro leaned back in his chair, rubbing his chin. "So… no physical mail. And yet, a postman? A real one? Have we ever seen one before?"

Borges rolled onto his side, considering. "Not that I recall."

Pascal flicked his tail. "Certainly not at this house. You've lived here for how long? Decades? And not once has an actual postman set foot on this property."

Álvaro squinted down the road, where the mailman had disappeared. "So why now?"

Borges stretched. "Maybe it was an omen."

Pascal scoffed. "Or a clerical error. Which, honestly, is the same thing."

Álvaro exhaled through his nose. "You think he'll come back?"

Borges wagged his tail. "I hope so. He looked like he had a real crisis back there. I want to see how he handles it next time."

Pascal groaned. "I, for one, am not looking forward to this. I liked it better when this house was off the grid, forgotten by time and society."

Álvaro smirked. "Maybe we should invite him in next time. Offer him coffee. Ask him deep, unsettling questions about the nature of his work."

Pascal gave him a withering look. "You do realize he will either quit his job or start sending us mail just to spite you?"

Álvaro shrugged. "Either way, I win."

Álvaro tapped his fingers against his mug, staring down the road where the mailman had disappeared. Pascal, ever the voice of exasperated reason, flicked his tail and said, "Go and ask Petunia if she gets mail."

Álvaro blinked. "Miss Petunia? You think she actually gets letters?"

Pascal gave him a flat look. "She's well over a hundred years old. If anyone around here still gets real mail, it's her."

Borges stretched, yawning. "Makes sense. The woman probably has pen pals from a century ago who still think email is witchcraft."

Álvaro considered this, then set his mug down on the porch railing. "Alright. Let's settle this mystery."

He stood up, brushing nonexistent dust off his robe, and made his way down the narrow path toward Miss Petunia's house. Borges followed lazily, while Pascal, preferring dignity over curiosity, stayed behind on the railing.

As he reached her front door, Álvaro knocked—twice, firmly, as was custom. A moment later, the door creaked open just a crack, revealing Miss Petunia's sharp, knowing eyes peering out from the darkness.

"Oh, it's you," she said, as if she had been expecting him. "What do you want, Álvaro?"

He grinned. "Just a question, Miss Petunia. Do you get mail?"

She blinked at him, then let out a raspy chuckle. "Mail? You mean, like, envelopes and stamps? What is this, 1953?"

She stepped back, swinging the door open just enough for him to see inside. Instead of dusty stacks of old letters, the room was immaculately modern. On a small table sat a sleek tablet, propped up on a stand, notifications flickering across the screen.

She tapped it with a bony finger. "Emails. Newsletters. Occasionally, some nonsense from that scam prince who wants my bank details. But paper mail? Pfft. I haven't gotten a real letter in at least twenty years."

Álvaro squinted. "No letters at all? Ever?"

Miss Petunia smirked. "Unless you count the time the neighborhood association sent a complaint about my ‘aggressive’ Halloween decorations. Which, by the way, were completely appropriate. People need to toughen up."

Álvaro scratched his head. "So… the mailman who just showed up at my place was…"

"Lost," she supplied. "Or a ghost. You never know with those government employees."

A familiar ping echoed from her phone. She pulled it out, glanced at the screen, and snorted. "Ah, another TikTok. Some kid trying to teach

me how to make a ‘rage sandwich.’ Honestly, the internet is a mess. I love it."

Álvaro stared. "You… use TikTok?"

Miss Petunia shot him a sharp look. "What do you think I do all day? Knit? I’ve got 50,000 followers, Álvaro. People love my cooking rants. Now, was there a reason you came here, or are you just here to be judgmental?"

Álvaro opened his mouth. Closed it. Opened it again. "No, that about covers it."

Miss Petunia smirked. "Good. Now get off my porch. I have comments to reply to."

The door shut in his face.

Álvaro turned slowly and shuffled back home, where Pascal was waiting, tail flicking expectantly.

"Well?" the cat asked.

Álvaro sighed. "No mail. Just emails. And… TikToks."

Pascal nodded. "As I suspected. The postman is an anomaly. We should assume he is either a mistake in the system or an omen of impending doom."

Borges yawned. "Or, hear me out, just a guy doing his job."

Álvaro rubbed his temples. "No. That's too easy. Something is off here. And I intend to find out what."

Pascal sighed. "Of course you do."

Álvaro barely had time to process Miss Petunia's TikTok stardom before the sharp chime of the doorbell snapped him back to reality. Borges lifted his head. Pascal's tail twitched.

Álvaro frowned. He wasn't expecting anyone.

He set down his coffee and shuffled to the door, his robe dragging against the wooden floor. He unlocked it, pulled it open, and found himself face to face with a man.

A stranger.

Middle-aged, disheveled, sweating. His eyes were wild, filled with something between urgency and terror. His lips parted.

"Prolegomena…"

Then, without another word, he collapsed forward, face-first into Álvaro's doorstep.

A knife protruded from his back.

Álvaro blinked.

Borges stood up. "Well. That's new."

Pascal sighed, already unimpressed. "Fantastic. And here I was hoping for a quiet afternoon."

Álvaro rubbed his temples. "I haven't even finished my coffee."

Pascal flicked his tail. "So. What now?"

Álvaro exhaled, stepping over the corpse and glancing out into the street. Empty. No sign of whoever did this. He looked down at the man, then at the knife, then back at Borges and Pascal.

Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Present Itself as a Science.

Immanuel Kant. Álvaro's mind raced. A cornerstone of philosophical thought, dense yet pivotal, foundational for epistemology. But what could it possibly mean in this context?

Then sirens screamed through the quiet morning, the flashing red and blue lights painting the porch in feverish pulses. Borges huffed, ears twitching at the noise. Pascal, already weary of the situation, leapt onto the windowsill, observing from a safe distance.

Álvaro, still standing over the body, sipped his coffee.

Then they came.

Men in blue. Rushing in. Guns drawn. Faces sharp with suspicion.

They surrounded him. Their eyes locked onto him like wolves scenting blood.

A long, heavy silence stretched.

Álvaro took another sip, smacked his lips, and sighed. "I suppose saying ‘I can explain’ wouldn’t really help here, would it?"

One of them—tall, square-jawed, built like an old refrigerator—stepped forward, gun still trained. "Step away from the body."

Álvaro glanced down at the corpse sprawled on his porch, then back up at the officer. "Oh, good. You noticed him too. I was beginning to wonder if I was hallucinating."

"Now." The officer’s voice was steel.

Borges wagged his tail. "I don't think they appreciate your humor, Álvaro."

Pascal, from his perch, sighed. "What a shocking revelation."

Álvaro exhaled and took a slow step back, raising his hands slightly. "Gentlemen, I assure you, this is all very unfortunate but entirely not my fault."

Another officer—shorter, younger, eyes sharp—tilted his head. "Not your fault?" He gestured toward the body. "There's a dead man on your porch with a knife in his back."

Álvaro nodded. "Yes. And as you can see, I'm drinking coffee, not holding a knife."

The first officer narrowed his eyes. "Who is he?"

Álvaro shrugged. "I was about to ask him that. Unfortunately, he only got as far as

‘Prolegomena’ before dramatically dying at my feet."

Silence.

The officers exchanged glances.

The short one frowned. "Prolego-what?"

Álvaro glanced up. "Do any of you know Kant?"

The officers blinked, momentarily stunned by the non sequitur.

The tallest among them—broad-shouldered, with a permanent scowl—stepped forward. "What are you talking about?"

Álvaro gestured toward the dead man at his feet, still gripping his coffee cup in one hand. "Kant. Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics. It's what he said before he died. Do none of you see how strange that is?"

The officer frowned. "What's strange is there's a dead man on your porch with a knife in his back."

Álvaro raised his hand. "Yes, yes, tragic, of course. But consider the last word he spoke! Prolegomena. Not 'help.' Not 'save me.' Not even 'ouch.' He chose Kant. Doesn't that strike you as odd?"

The shorter officer, visibly younger and thoroughly confused, whispered to his partner, "What's a prolego-something?"

Álvaro sighed deeply, pinching the bridge of his nose. "It's a work by Immanuel Kant. A critical precursor to his Critique of Pure Reason. It's not exactly what you'd expect as someone's dying word unless they were delivering a cryptic message."

The tall officer's jaw tightened. "We're not here for philosophy lessons. Step back, hands where we can see them."

Álvaro complied, setting his coffee cup carefully on the porch railing. "Fine, fine. But you should write that word down. It's obviously important."

Borges padded closer, sniffing the body. Pascal, from his perch on the windowsill, let out an exasperated sigh.

"Only Álvaro could turn a murder investigation into a lecture on 18th-century metaphysics."

Álvaro smirked at the cat. "Someone has to keep the standards high."

The officers, clearly unimpressed, began securing the scene. Álvaro crossed his arms, watching as they worked.

"I'm telling you," he muttered to himself. "This is more than just a random murder. That word means something. And I'll find out what."

Pascal flicked his tail. "Just try not to get arrested before you do."

The officers stood stiffly, their hands hovering near their holsters, their patience thinning.

Alvaro exhaled slowly. "Gentlemen, instead of simply telling you why the victim's last word matters, allow me to guide you there. Step by step. A little intellectual exercise, if you will."

The tall officer, clearly unimpressed, grunted. "This isn't a game, sir."

Álvaro nodded. "Of course not. But consider this: If a man is dying, why would he spend his last breath saying something obscure instead of calling for help?"

The younger officer frowned. "Maybe he was delirious?"

Álvaro tilted his head. "Possibly. But if that were the case, wouldn't his words be random, incoherent? 'Prolegomena' is very specific. Now, let's suppose it wasn't random. What does that imply?"

The young officer hesitated, then muttered, "That he wanted someone to hear it?"

Álvaro smiled. "Exactly. A message. A clue. Now, what is Prolegomena?"

The tall officer crossed his arms. "Some old book, you said. By Kant."

Álvaro nodded. "Correct. But not just any book—it's a philosophical prologue, a foundational text. It lays the groundwork for a more significant, complex argument. Now, if

someone says Prolegomena in their last breath, what could they be implying?"

The younger officer blinked. "That… there's something bigger coming?"

Álvaro snapped his fingers. "Bingo. A prelude to something more. A warning, even."

The tall officer narrowed his eyes. "Are you saying this guy was trying to tell us something before he died?"

Álvaro spread his hands. "I'm saying he might have been setting up the groundwork—just like Kant did. Maybe he knew he wouldn't get the full message out, but he wanted to point us in the right direction. Whatever this is, it doesn't end with him."

The younger officer shifted uncomfortably, looking at his partner. "That… actually makes sense."

The tall officer was silent for a long moment, then grunted. "Fine. Let's say you're right. What the hell are we supposed to do with that?"

Álvaro smirked. "Well, gentlemen, that's your job. I'm just here for the coffee."

Pascal sighed from the windowsill. "You enjoyed that far too much."

Borges wagged his tail. "At least they're thinking now."

The tall officer exhaled sharply and turned to his men. "Alright. Get me everything we can find on this guy. And someone look into that Kant book. If it's a clue, we're following it."

As the officers got to work, Álvaro leaned against his porch railing, sipping his coffee again.

"See?" he muttered. "A little Socratic method, and suddenly the world makes sense."

Pascal flicked his tail. "Sense? You just dragged the police into a philosophical mystery. Nothing about this is normal."

Álvaro smirked. "Good. Normal is boring."

Later that night, under the dim glow of a single desk lamp, Álvaro set his pen down and leaned

back in his chair. He exhaled, rubbing his temples, his fingers stained with ink. The table before him was littered with scribbled notes, half-drunk coffee cups, and a precarious tower of philosophy books.

His seventeenth paper on the first chapter of Being and Time was finally complete.

He glanced at the pages—meticulously written, dissecting, scrutinizing, and unraveling Heidegger's Introduction: The Exposition of the Question of Being with obsessive precision. Every nuance, every implication, every contradiction had been pulled apart and examined like the gears of an ancient, rusted machine.

He took another sip of now-cold coffee, grimacing at the taste.

Borges, lying on the rug beside him, yawned. "Seventeen. Do you think that's enough?"

Álvaro snorted. "Enough? Hardly. I've barely scratched the surface."

Pascal, curled on a nearby stack of books, lazily flicked his tail. "Seventeen papers on the same chapter, Álvaro. Do you ever consider writing about something else?"

Álvaro waved a dismissive hand. "As if you could ever exhaust the first chapter. Heidegger structures it like a labyrinth—it's impossible to read it only once and claim to understand it."

Borges rolled onto his back. "And yet, normal people move past the introduction eventually."

Álvaro scoffed. "Normal people are amateurs."

Pascal stretched. "I sometimes wonder if you actually want answers or if you just enjoy the suffering."

Álvaro smirked. "Why not both?"

Outside, the night was silent except for the occasional rustle of the wind through the trees. The police investigation had quieted down for now, but the word Prolegomena still lurked at the back of Álvaro's mind, refusing to be ignored.

He drummed his fingers on the desk, eyes drifting over his paper, then sighed.

"Alright. One last edit, then I'll sleep."

Borges huffed. "You said that after the sixteenth paper."

Álvaro ignored him, picking up his pen.

Then the boom shattered the silence.

The force of it opened the windows, knocking over stacks of books and sending Álvaro's half-empty coffee cup clattering to the floor. The explosion's roar seemed to stretch time, a rolling thunderclap that vibrated through the walls, through his chest, through his bones.

Borges was on his feet in an instant, ears pricked. Pascal leapt from his perch, hissing as papers and books rained down around him.

Álvaro, heart pounding, rushed to the window.

Outside, the street was illuminated by a searing, unnatural light. A plume of fire and black smoke curled into the sky, swallowing the stars. A car, or what remained of it, burned ferociously in the middle of the road. The twisted metal carcass crackled and groaned, flames licking hungrily at what was left.

Álvaro narrowed his eyes, his mind working past the initial shock. A car bomb. Deliberate.

Pascal, perched near the window, still tense from the shockwave, flicked his tail. "This feels… personal."

Borges growled low. "Someone wanted to send a message."

Álvaro's grip on the windowsill tightened. "Yes. But to whom?"

He scanned the scene. No immediate movement. No figures darting away. Just the chaos of fire and destruction. The police would be here soon. The sirens would come. But right now, in this exact moment, there was only him, standing at his window, watching the flames rise.

And then he saw it.

Just beyond the wreckage, a figure. Distant. Motionless. Watching.

A silhouette against the firelight.

Then, as if sensing Álvaro's gaze, the figure turned—and disappeared into the darkness.

Álvaro exhaled, his breath fogging against the glass.

"Right," he muttered, rubbing his temples. "So much for a quiet night of philosophy."

Álvaro barely had time to process the scene—the burning wreckage, the fleeing figure, the acrid smoke curling into the sky—before a sharp, impatient knock rapped against his door.

Álvaro groaned, rubbing his face before dragging himself to the door. He opened it to find Miss Petunia, standing there in a heavy wool robe, slippers, and the kind of look that could stop a charging bull in its tracks.

Her snow-white hair was in perfect order despite the explosion.

Her eyes, sharp as ever, flicked to Álvaro's disheveled robe, then past him to the glow of flames reflecting in his window. She sniffed the air.

"Car bomb?" she asked flatly.

Álvaro ran a hand through his already unkempt hair. "Yeah."

She nodded, unimpressed. "Took ‘em long enough."

Álvaro blinked. "Sorry—what?"

Miss Petunia stepped inside, uninvited, and helped herself to the coffee in the kitchen. She took a sip, wrinkled her nose, and muttered, "You always make it too bitter."

Álvaro shut the door, utterly bewildered. "What do you mean, ‘took them long enough’? Who’s ‘them’?"

She set down the mug and gave him a knowing look. "Oh, Álvaro. You really need to start paying attention."

Pascal, perched on a stack of books, muttered, "I think I like where this is going."

Borges, tail wagging slightly, simply said, "Told you this wasn't random."

Álvaro folded his arms. "Miss Petunia, are you telling me that you were expecting a car bomb to go off in front of my house?"

She smirked. "Not necessarily your house. But somewhere nearby? Absolutely."

Álvaro stared at her, mouth slightly open, before finally muttering, "I need a drink."

Miss Petunia gestured toward the whiskey bottle on the shelf. "Drink then. And get me one while you're at it."

The night had just gotten a whole lot weirder.

Miss Petunia settled into Álvaro's creaky armchair like she owned the place, crossing her legs with the kind of confidence only a century of existence could grant. She took the whiskey glass Álvaro begrudgingly handed her, swirled it, sniffed it, and took a small sip.

"Hmm. Acceptable."

Álvaro, still standing, arms crossed, scowled at her. "Start talking."

Borges lay at her feet, watching with mild amusement. Pascal, ever the skeptic, curled his tail around himself and muttered, "This should be good."

Miss Petunia sighed, setting her glass down with deliberate slowness. "Álvaro, dear, do you know why I've lived so long?"

He frowned. "Because you defy all known laws of biology?"

She chuckled. "Because I know when to mind my business… and when to pay attention."

Álvaro exhaled through his nose. "And what exactly have you been paying attention to?"

She tapped a gnarled finger against her temple. "That man who died on your porch tonight? Not the first strange thing to happen around here lately. And you, my dear, are in the middle of it."

Álvaro scoffed. "I didn't even know the guy!"

Miss Petunia raised an eyebrow. "No. But he knew you."

Silence. The words sank in like a slow poison.

Álvaro's jaw tightened. "Explain."

Miss Petunia leaned forward. "He wasn't just some random victim, Álvaro. And he didn't just happen to show up at your door. Someone sent him here, and they made sure he wouldn't live long enough to explain why."

Álvaro's stomach twisted. The last word the man had said—Prolegomena. A deliberate clue. A warning. And now a car bomb, a watching figure in the shadows, and Miss Petunia casually

sipping whiskey like she wasn't dropping earth-shattering revelations.

Álvaro pinched the bridge of his nose. "Petunia. Who the hell do you think killed him?"

She tilted her head. "The same people who sent the bomb. And the same people who are probably watching this house right now, waiting to see what you do next."

Borges huffed. "That's comforting."

Pascal flicked an ear. "I assume this is where we start regretting our choices."

Álvaro set his glass down a little too hard. "Alright. Enough riddles. Who are they?"

Miss Petunia's lips curled into a smirk.

"Tell me, Álvaro… how well do you really know the people who are investigating this case?"

The room went cold.

Álvaro's mind whirled back to the officers. Their initial skepticism. The way they immediately assumed he was the suspect. The way they dismissed Prolegomena—until he made them think about it.

And then there was the way they'd left. Too quickly. Almost as if…

As if they weren't investigating at all, but stalling. Watching.

His pulse quickened. "You're saying the police are in on this?"

Miss Petunia took another sip of whiskey, her eyes gleaming.

"I'm saying, Álvaro, that you should start packing your bags."

Álvaro gripped the edge of his desk, his pulse hammering. The air in the room had shifted—something heavier now, something old and dangerous.

He stared at Miss Petunia, who sat too comfortably in the storm she had just conjured.

"Who are they, Petunia?" he demanded, voice low. "And more importantly… who the hell are you?"

She smiled. Not the warm, grandmotherly smile he had seen when she received her morning newspaper, but something else—something sharp, like a blade hidden in velvet.

She set her whiskey glass down gently, then folded her hands in her lap.

"They," she said, "are people who don't like unfinished business. And you, my dear Álvaro, just became very, very unfinished business."

Borges growled under his breath. Pascal's ears flattened.

Álvaro narrowed his eyes. "That's not an answer."

Miss Petunia sighed, as if deciding how much to tell him. Then, after a pause, she leaned forward, her voice quieter now, but heavier.

"I used to be like you. Caught in something bigger than I understood. Back when people still sent letters, back when telegrams carried orders that could make or unmake a man. I was a courier, Álvaro. But not for the post office."

A cold weight settled in Álvaro's stomach.

"A courier?"

She smirked. "A messenger. A ghost on train platforms, in hotel lobbies, slipping documents

into pockets, retrieving information before it could disappear forever. Sometimes delivering knowledge, sometimes erasing it. And the people I worked for? Let's just say they had a very particular interest in what people knew—and what they shouldn't."

Álvaro exhaled slowly. "Spies."

Miss Petunia gave a small, amused nod. "Close enough."

He shook his head, reeling. "And they—the ones who killed this man, the ones who bombed the car—are the same kind of people?"

She tilted her head. "Some of them. But more dangerous. The difference between what I did

and what they do is that I only buried information. They bury people."

The fire outside crackled. The distant wail of sirens had stopped. The world was quiet. Too quiet.

Álvaro took a breath, then another. "Why kill him on my porch?"

Miss Petunia looked at him for a long moment, then said, simply:

"Because you were the last person who was supposed to hear what he had to say."

Álvaro's pulse pounded. The last word. Prolegomena. A message meant for him. A word

that pointed to something before something else.

His mouth went dry. "What was he trying to tell me?"

Miss Petunia met his gaze, eyes unreadable.

"That depends, Álvaro."

She leaned back, swirling her whiskey.

"What do you know… that's worth killing for?"

"Well... my grandma's rabbit stew's dying for..."

Miss Petunia let out a sharp, unexpected laugh. "Ha! Well, if it's truly that good, I imagine someone, somewhere, would kill for the recipe."

Borges tilted his head. "Do you actually know how to make it, or is this just your usual deflection?"

Álvaro smirked, crossing his arms. "My grandmother guarded that recipe like a state secret. She made sure I knew it, though. Just in case the family ever needed an emergency diplomatic negotiation tool."

Pascal sighed, flicking his tail. "I hate that this is both a joke and completely plausible."

Miss Petunia, still smiling, sipped her whiskey. "Clever, Álvaro. But you know what I meant."

The humor faded from his face. "I don't know, Petunia. I really don't. I've written about

everything from Kant to Heidegger to why academic conferences are just overpriced group therapy for intellectual narcissists. I don't see how any of that would get someone stabbed to death on my porch."

Miss Petunia set her glass down with a soft clink. "It's not just about what you've written, Álvaro. It's about what you might find out."

Álvaro stiffened.

Miss Petunia continued, her voice slow, deliberate. "People like them—they don't care about what's already known. They care about what's hidden. What's buried. What could be discovered if someone like you, someone with your particular mind, started asking the wrong questions."

A cold unease settled in his chest.

"And this?" He gestured to the burned wreckage outside. "This is supposed to scare me off?"

Miss Petunia smiled again, but this time it was grim. "No, Álvaro. This is a warning. A final one."

Silence filled the room.

Borges let out a low growl. Pascal, from his perch, muttered, "I assume you're not planning to take the hint and walk away?"

Álvaro picked up his whiskey, downed it in one burning gulp, and set the glass down with a decisive thud.

"Hell no."

Miss Petunia's smirk returned. "Good answer."

Álvaro exhaled sharply, staring at the empty whiskey glass in his hand. Damn it.

He had been staying sober. For months. No alcohol, no self-medication through cheap bourbon or fine scotch. Discipline. Clarity. Focus.

And then, in a single moment, with a dead man on his porch, a car bomb outside, and Miss Petunia casually revealing she used to be a Cold War ghost, he had broken his own rule without even thinking.

Borges gave him a long, knowing look. "That was quick."

Pascal, still perched on the windowsill, flicked his tail with an almost smug satisfaction. "Predictable, really."

Álvaro scowled, setting the glass down hard. "It was reflex. Doesn't count."

Miss Petunia arched an eyebrow. "That's how it starts, dear."

He ran a hand through his hair, feeling the weight of it all settling in. The headache, the adrenaline, the sheer insanity of the past few hours.

No. He couldn't afford to slip. Not now. Not when someone had just literally exploded a warning at his doorstep.

He took a deep breath, pushed the whiskey bottle away, and poured himself a cup of coffee instead. Strong. Bitter. No shortcuts.

Borges wagged his tail approvingly. "Better choice."

Pascal let out a disappointed sigh. "Boring choice."

Miss Petunia simply watched him, amused. "You know, Álvaro… I like you better when you're clear-headed. You think faster. And you're going to need that."

He met her gaze, eyes sharp again. "Yeah? For what?"

She leaned forward, voice dropping just enough to send a chill down his spine.

"For what's coming next."

Álvaro took a long, slow sip of his coffee, staring at the swirling black liquid like it might hold the answers he needed. His mind raced through the last few hours—a dead man on his porch, a car bomb outside, a shadowy figure watching, and now Miss Petunia revealing she was some kind of Cold War courier for people who buried secrets instead of keeping them.

He exhaled sharply, setting the coffee cup down with a thud.

"This is a bad time to quit drinking."

Borges huffed. "You're telling me."

Pascal, still lounging on his stack of books, flicked his tail. "And yet, here we are."

Miss Petunia chuckled, swirling the whiskey in her own glass. "Oh, Álvaro. There's never a good time to quit drinking, but there are certainly worse times. And I'd say getting thrown into a conspiracy with armed men and explosives qualifies."

Álvaro shot her a look. "You're not exactly making me feel better about this."

She smirked. "Wasn't trying to."

He pinched the bridge of his nose. "Alright. So let's sum this up: someone with a knife in his back dies on my porch, mutters Prolegomena, then a car explodes outside my house. You tell me it's not random. That I've been noticed. That there are people who—let me guess—want me dead, or worse, silent."

Miss Petunia nodded. "Correct."

Álvaro exhaled. "And you? You just happened to know all this? Just happened to be awake after the explosion?"

She smiled. "Álvaro, dear, I haven't slept through the night in seventy years. Some habits die harder than others."

A chill ran down his spine.

"And you're helping me because…?"

She took another sip of whiskey. "Because you're not ready yet. And because I dislike amateurs dying needlessly when they have potential."

Pascal let out an exaggerated sigh. "Great. You're a project now."

Borges tilted his head. "Well, he does need supervision."

Álvaro scowled. "I need answers."

Miss Petunia leaned forward, her voice lowering to something more serious.

"Then you'd better start asking the right questions, Álvaro. And fast."

Outside, the wreckage still smoldered. Somewhere in the darkness, someone was still watching.

“Well, if I'm doing this, I'm not doing it lucid. No booze? Well... Miss Petunia, can you cook edibles?”

Miss Petunia blinked once. Then, without missing a beat, she took another slow sip of her whiskey, smirked, and said:

"Álvaro, dear, do you think I've lived this long without knowing how to make edibles?"

Borges let out a single amused huff. Pascal, from his perch, flicked his tail and muttered, "I'm not sure whether to be horrified or impressed."

Álvaro exhaled. "Good. Because if I'm doing this, I'm not doing it lucid." He leaned against the table, rubbing his temples. "I don't need alcohol. I just need the world to be a little… softer around the edges."

Miss Petunia chuckled, standing up with the kind of ease that suggested this was far from her first rodeo.

"Give me an hour."

Álvaro arched an eyebrow. "That fast?"

She gave him a look. "What do you think I do all day, Álvaro? Knit?"

Pascal groaned. "I hate that she keeps proving me wrong."

Borges wagged his tail. "I, for one, support this development."

Miss Petunia made her way toward the kitchen, rolling up the sleeves of her robe. "I assume you don't want anything too strong? Or are we aiming for full existential disassociation?"

Álvaro considered. "Somewhere between functionally impaired and conversational with Heidegger's ghost."

She cackled. "Understood."

Borges stretched. "I feel like we should be concerned about this plan."

Pascal sighed. "We should. But it's too late to stop it now."

Miss Petunia was already gathering ingredients, moving with the practiced precision of someone who had clearly done this before.

Álvaro poured himself another coffee, shaking his head. "You know, Petunia, every time I think I have you figured out…"

She shot him a grin over her shoulder. "Oh, Álvaro. You haven't even scratched the surface."

As Miss Petunia effortlessly prepared the edibles in the kitchen—measuring, grinding, infusing like a chemist in the final stages of an experiment—Álvaro leaned back in his chair, tapping his fingers against his mug.

His mind, now slightly more detached from the immediate chaos of dead men and exploding cars, drifted back to Hannah Arendt.

The banality of evil.

Not the kind of operatic, over-the-top villainy people expected, but something mundane, procedural, disturbingly normal. The kind that disguised itself in bureaucracy, in quiet complicity, in people who "were just doing their job" while facilitating unspeakable horrors.

He stared out at the still-smoldering remains of the car bomb outside. Someone had done that. Some one. Not a faceless entity. Not some abstract force of fate. A person.

And to them, it was probably just another task. Just another job to complete before clocking out for the day.

He exhaled. "Petunia, tell me something."

She didn't look up from the mixing bowl. "Depends. Will it require me to stop what I'm doing?"

"No. It's about what you said earlier—about them, about these people who don't like unfinished business."

She nodded, stirring something with far too much ease. "What about them?"

"Do they believe in what they’re doing? Or are they just… another machine in the system?"

She finally glanced up, eyes sharp. "You mean, do they think they're the good guys?"

Álvaro shrugged. "More like—do they think at all? Or are they just fulfilling a function?"

Miss Petunia smirked. "Ah. Now you're asking the real questions."

She wiped her hands on a kitchen towel, walked back over, and took a seat across from him, the smell of melted butter and something slightly more illicit still clinging to her fingers.

"Some of them believe," she said, voice lower now, more measured. "Some of them are zealots. True believers in whatever cause they think justifies their actions. Those ones are dangerous, but predictable."

She picked up her whiskey glass and swirled it. "But the ones you really have to worry about? They're the ones who don't care. The ones for whom it's just another day at the office. The ones who pull triggers or plant bombs the same way they'd file paperwork."

Álvaro felt something cold settle in his chest. "Banality."

She nodded. "Exactly. It's not personal for them. And that’s what makes them so damn effective."

He ran a hand down his face. "So what does that mean for me?"

Miss Petunia downed the rest of her whiskey, set the glass down, and grinned.

"It means you have to make it personal."

Outside, the embers of the car bomb still glowed faintly in the dark.

Inside, the oven timer dinged.

The edibles were ready.

Miss Petunia pulled the tray from the oven with the kind of practiced grace that suggested this wasn't her first time baking contraband. The

rich, buttery scent mixed with something distinctly more illicit, wafting through the air like a promise.

She smirked, setting the tray down. "Alright, children. Come and get it."

Álvaro stretched his fingers. "Finally. Let's get profoundly, irresponsibly high."

Borges wagged his tail enthusiastically. Pascal, ever the skeptic, eyed the brownies with feline suspicion.

"I'm not convinced this is the best decision we've ever made," Pascal muttered.

Álvaro picked up a warm, gooey piece and took a decisive bite. "And yet, here we are."

Borges snatched his own piece and devoured it before anyone could object. Miss Petunia casually broke off a smaller chunk for herself, nibbling with the calm of a woman who had long since transcended the concept of consequence.

Pascal sighed, finally relenting. "Fine. But if I start philosophizing about the meaning of the universe, that's on you."

Álvaro grinned. "Pascal, you do that sober."

They ate.

At first, nothing.

Then, a slow, creeping warmth. A heaviness behind the eyes. The edges of reality softened,

like the corners of an old book bending inward. The world melted just a little, losing its sharp angles, turning into something dreamlike, something strange, something—

"Borges. Your ears are… vibrating."

Borges, lying flat on his back, wagged his tail at an impossibly slow speed.

"I can hear time."

Pascal blinked. "Oh no."

Álvaro, still chewing, stared at his hands. "I think my fingers have opinions."

Miss Petunia exhaled happily, reclining in her chair. "See? Isn't this much better than drinking?"

Outside, the wreckage of a car bomb still smoldered. Somewhere in the dark, people were plotting, watching, waiting.

Inside, everyone was way too high to care.

Pascal sighed. "Well, I suppose if we're all going to die soon, at least we'll be relaxed about it."

Álvaro stared at the ceiling and muttered something about Heidegger's concept of Being.

And then he started laughing.

And couldn't stop.

Alvaro spoke slowly. “Duudes... IF THE ARCHBISHOP OF CONSTANTINOPLE WANTED TO DISARCHBISHOP CONSTANTINOPOLISATE himself, WOULD YOU TOO DISARCHBISHOPSTANTINOPOLIZE yourselves for THE ARCHBISHOP OF CONSTANTINOPLE?”

Borges, flat on his back, staring at the ceiling, let out a slow, profound breath. "I would… but only if the Archbishop of Constantinople truly desired to be disarchbishopstantinopolized."

Pascal, eyes wide, pupils fully dilated, twitched his tail. "This is a linguistic nightmare. I refuse to participate."

Miss Petunia, reclining comfortably, sipped at an entirely imaginary cup of tea, nodding sagely. "Ah, but you see, the Archbishop's agency in this matter is crucial. If he only seeks to be disarchbishopstantinopolized under duress, then are we not merely reinforcing his imposed ecclesiastical identity?"

Álvaro clutched his head. "You're telling me… we could be TRAPPING the Archbishop in a cycle of recursive Constantinopolitan authority?!?"

Borges nodded solemnly. "Exactly. The only way to truly liberate him would be to preemptively counter-disarchbishopstantinopolize his disarchbishopric inclinations."

Pascal groaned. "No. No, I refuse. I am NOT getting dragged into a metaphysical crisis about an imaginary Archbishop in Constantinople!"

Álvaro sat up abruptly. "BUT IF YOU DON'T PARTICIPATE, THEN WHO WILL KEEP THE BALANCE BETWEEN ARCHBISHOPSTAN AND DISARCHBISHOPSTANTINOPOLIZATION?"

Miss Petunia took another slow, deliberate bite of her brownie. "The real question is, was Constantinople ever truly Constantinople? Or was it always, inevitably, Istanbul?"

Silence.

Borges blinked. "Whoa."

Álvaro gasped audibly. "Did we just break history?"

Pascal covered his face with his paws. "I hate all of you."

And somewhere, deep in the fog of their collective high, they all knew…

This would somehow become relevant later.

“Guys, when people orgasm say they are coming... but where from?”

Silence.

A profound, universe-altering silence settled over the room.

Borges, still sprawled out, blinked slowly. "Oh no."

Pascal, eyes wide, stared into the middle distance like a soldier who had seen too much. "We are absolutely too high for this conversation."

Miss Petunia, unfazed, took another slow bite of her brownie. "Ah, now that's a question worth pondering."

Álvaro, leaning forward with the intensity of a man who had just discovered a new field of metaphysics, pressed his fingers together. "No, seriously. We say 'I'm coming' as if we are arriving somewhere. But from where? And—to where?"

Borges rolled onto his side. "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single thrust."

Pascal groaned, burying his face in his paws. "This is what happens when we let humans do philosophy while high."

Miss Petunia, swirling the last sip of her whiskey, nodded sagely. "One could argue that in that moment, one is transcending space and time. Arriving not at a location, but at a state of being."

Álvaro's eyes widened. "An ontological arrival."

Borges gasped. "A Kantian climax!"

Pascal let out an exasperated sigh. "Oh my God, stop."

Álvaro ignored him, fully committed now. "But if one is coming, that means one must also be leaving something behind. What if—"

Borges sat up suddenly. "Wait. WAIT. What if orgasm is the closest we get to understanding death?"

A hush fell over the room.

Miss Petunia nodded approvingly. "The French do call it la petite mort—the little death."

Álvaro gasped. "OH MY GOD. THE FRENCH WERE ONTO SOMETHING."

Borges stood up on wobbly legs. "Guys. I think we just unlocked a universal truth."

Pascal, groaning in existential pain, flopped dramatically onto his side. "I am begging you all to shut up."

Miss Petunia stretched, standing up with a satisfied sigh. "This was a delightful conversation. But I do believe I need a nap."

Álvaro stared at the ceiling, mind spiraling. "Guys. If we keep thinking about this, we might never come back."

Borges wagged his tail, still dazed. "From where, Álvaro? From where?"

Pascal let out the longest sigh in feline history. "I need new friends."

“Pascal, you're my 42”

Pascal, still sprawled across his stack of books, lifted his head just enough to glare at Álvaro. "Excuse me?"

Álvaro grinned, eyes still glassy from whatever reality-warping effect Miss Petunia’s edibles were having on his brain. "You’re my 42."

Borges wagged his tail in slow, existential amusement. "Oh. Oh, that’s good."

Miss Petunia chuckled, swirling the last sip of her whiskey. "Hitchhiker’s Guide. Clever. I like it."

Pascal squinted, processing. Then, with the deepest sigh yet, he rubbed a paw over his face. "So let me get this straight. You are, at this moment, claiming that I—a literal cat—am the answer to life, the universe, and everything?"

Álvaro nodded solemnly. "Yes."

Borges tilted his head. "Well, think about it. He feeds you, you judge him constantly, and when he stares into the void, you're always there, silently making things seem even more absurd than they already are. Sounds pretty cosmic to me."

Pascal flicked his tail. "This is either the greatest compliment I've ever received, or the dumbest

thing you've ever said. And I genuinely cannot tell which."

Álvaro gestured dramatically. "That's the beauty of it, Pascal. That's the magic."

Miss Petunia nodded sagely. "Ah, but if Pascal is 42, then what is the question?"

Silence.

A deep, eerie, infinite silence.

Borges' ears twitched. "Oh no. We've done it again."

Álvaro, eyes wide, whispered to himself: "What is the question?"

Pascal, tail flicking aggressively, stood up. "No. No, we are not going down this road. Not again. I refuse to let this turn into another existential spiral about ontological absurdity. I—"

Álvaro grabbed his shoulders. "BUT WHAT IS THE QUESTION, PASCAL?"

Pascal hissed in frustration. "THE QUESTION IS WHY I STILL LIVE HERE."

Miss Petunia laughed, standing up. "Well, this has been delightful. I'm going to bed before you all invent a new branch of metaphysics."

Borges, still grinning, flopped onto his back. "I like being high."

Álvaro, eyes still locked on Pascal, whispered, "You are my 42."

Pascal let out the longest groan in recorded history. "I need a new universe."

Borges, still sprawled on the floor, wagged his tail in slow-motion. "Dude, what number am I?"

Álvaro, without hesitation, placed a solemn hand on Borges' head and said, "Man, you'll forever be my 69."

A pause.

Then Borges, grinning like an idiot, let out a deep, satisfied sigh. "Giggity."

Pascal let out an absolutely guttural groan. "No. No, we are NOT doing this."

Miss Petunia, halfway to her bedroom, cackled into her robe sleeve.

Álvaro grinned. "Too late, Pascal. It's been spoken. Borges is my 69, and there's nothing you can do about it."

Borges rolled onto his back, paws flopping dramatically. "It's an honor. A legacy. A sacred number."

Pascal glared at both of them. "You are literally the worst."

Álvaro nodded sagely. "No, Pascal. We are simply... nice."

Pascal turned away, muttering. "This is why I have trust issues."

Miss Petunia, still laughing, waved over her shoulder. "Don't burn down the house with your collective stupidity. I'm off to bed."

Borges snickered. "Sweet dreams, 420."

Miss Petunia stopped in her tracks.

Then, without looking back, she threw up a peace sign. "Blaze it, boys."

Pascal collapsed onto his side. "I give up."

Pascal had spent the past hour watching the rest of them spiral into various states of

metaphysical stupidity. He had judged. He had sighed. He had tried to remain above it all.

But then… the edibles hit.

His pupils dilated. His tail twitched. His whiskers shivered as if perceiving the fabric of reality itself.

And then, in the smallest, quietest voice, he whispered:

"What if philosophy… is just an existential CAPTCHA?"

Silence.

Álvaro, Borges, and Miss Petunia all turned slowly to stare at him.

Borges sat up in awe. "Oh my God."

Álvaro leaned forward, eyes wide. "Pascal. Say more."

Pascal's pupils were now black voids reflecting the infinite abyss. He stared at nothing, at everything. His fur stood slightly on end.

"Think about it," he murmured, his voice now a cryptic whisper. "Every major philosopher. Every existential crisis. Every desperate attempt to define meaning and selfhood and consciousness. It's all just… a giant, unending CAPTCHA."

Miss Petunia, now fully committed to this nonsense, sipped her whiskey and nodded

sagely. "And the question, of course, is: Are you human?"

Álvaro gasped audibly. "Holy. Shit."

Borges started pacing in circles. "Wait, wait, wait. Does this mean that if we fail to answer, we get locked out of existence?"

Pascal nodded solemnly. "Or worse… we get sent to the next CAPTCHA. Another reality. Another test. Over and over, infinitely."

Álvaro grabbed his own face. "GUYS. WHAT IF EVERY TIME WE DIE, WE JUST GET ANOTHER QUESTION??"

Borges, now fully panicked, spun in a full circle. "WHAT IF LIFE IS JUST A CAPTCHA TO

PROVE WE'RE WORTHY OF HIGHER BEING STATUS?!"

Miss Petunia, somehow the most relaxed person in the room, sighed contentedly. "You boys are finally catching up. I'm proud of you."

Pascal, now clutching a book like an anchor in a storm, whispered in pure dread: "What if I already failed the first CAPTCHA and that's why I was reincarnated as a cat?"

Borges stopped dead. "Dude."

Álvaro collapsed onto the floor, eyes to the ceiling, questioning every life decision that led to this moment.

"WHO'S EVEN CHECKING THE ANSWERS?" he yelled.

Pascal, tail flicking rapidly, whispered: "What if… it's Miss Petunia?"

They all slowly turned to look at her.

Miss Petunia, entirely unbothered, winked. "Now wouldn't that be something?"

Álvaro, Borges, and Pascal simultaneously lost their minds.

NEXT DAY

Álvaro woke up blissfully relaxed, sprawled across his armchair like a man who had just spent the night napping in a philosophical baby's diaper—whatever that meant.

His brain was light, empty of existential burdens, as if he had been gently cradled by the cosmic void itself and told, "Shhh, it's okay. None of it matters."

Borges stretched luxuriously beside him, letting out a satisfied yawn. "Dude. That was the best sleep I've ever had."

Pascal, curled atop a stack of books, blinked lazily. His fur was perfectly smooth, as if he had spent the night resting in the abstract concept of tranquility itself. "I feel… good. Which is concerning."

Then, almost in unison, they all felt it.

The craving.

Álvaro’s stomach rumbled. Borges' ears perked up. Pascal’s tail twitched with primal certainty.

"Bacon," Borges whispered.

Álvaro sat up, rubbing his face. "Why… do I suddenly need bacon?"

Pascal huffed, offended. "You? I'm a cat. I don't even eat bacon. And yet, here we are."

Borges wagged his tail, already trotting toward the kitchen. "Petunia. She must’ve made breakfast."

But as they stumbled toward the kitchen—dreamy, relaxed, and spiritually cleansed by the

previous night's edible-fueled metaphysics—they found nothing.

No bacon.

No coffee.

No Miss Petunia.

Just a note.

A single slip of paper, written in perfectly elegant cursive, sitting on the counter.

Álvaro picked it up, rubbing his bleary eyes as he read aloud:

"Had to go. You'll figure it out. Try not to die before then. - P"

Silence.

Pascal stared at the note, then at Álvaro. "We are absolutely going to die before then."

Borges sniffed the air. "She didn't even leave us bacon. This is betrayal."

Álvaro sighed, staring at the empty kitchen. "Guess that means we're on our own now."

He crumpled the note in his fist, took a deep breath, and muttered:

"Alright. Let's figure out what the hell is going on."

Pascal, already over it, stretched dramatically. "Fine. But first, bacon. Existential crises are easier on a full stomach."

Borges wagged his tail. "Agreed. Also, coffee. And then, maybe, we'll deal with the fact that Miss Petunia has clearly left us in the middle of a conspiracy we don't understand."

Alvaro: "Borges! you can't have coffee either! No coffee, no chocolate. Also: no nuts, no onion, no garlic"

Borges froze mid-tail-wag. His ears flicked. He slowly turned his head toward Álvaro, his expression one of betrayal, devastation, and disbelief.

"Excuse me?"

Álvaro, still groggy, waved a hand. "You can't have coffee, Borges. Or chocolate. Also: no nuts, no onion, no garlic. Toxic to dogs."

Borges stared into the abyss. "Are you telling me… that this whole time… you've been drinking coffee in front of me, and I can't have any?"

Pascal, fully awake now, grinned maliciously. "Oh, this is delicious."

Borges sat down with a dramatic sigh. "You mean to tell me that humans have access to an elixir that makes them more alive, more alert, more ready to take on the day—"

Álvaro nodded. "Yes."

"—And you have been enjoying it freely—"

"Correct."

"—While I, your most loyal companion, have been unknowingly deprived of this sacred gift?"

"Also correct."

Borges' soul shattered. "This is oppression."

Pascal yawned. "I can’t have coffee either, but you don’t hear me whining about it."

Borges gasped. "You don’t want coffee, Pascal. You exist in a state of smug, effortless superiority. I, however, am a creature of

boundless energy and joy. Coffee was made for spirits like mine!"

Álvaro poured himself another cup, taking a slow sip. "Yeah, you're definitely the one who needs more energy."

Borges flopped onto the floor, utterly defeated. "I have never known betrayal like this."

Pascal, enjoying every second of it, flicked his tail. "Oh, please. You'll move on in five minutes."

Borges grumbled into the rug. "You underestimate my capacity for holding grudges."

Álvaro sighed, rubbing his temples. "You want bacon or not?"

Borges perked up instantly. "Oh. Right. Bacon. Okay, fine. I'll allow you to continue existing."

Pascal sighed. "You're so easy to manipulate."

Borges wagged his tail. "I prefer to think of myself as strategically food-motivated."

Álvaro shook his head and started cooking. The day was young. The mysteries were piling up. But first?

“But you get puppuccinos. Humans don't get puppuccinos”
Borges froze mid-grumble. His ears perked up, and his tail gave an involuntary wag. "Wait."

Álvaro smirked, sipping his coffee. "Yeah. That's right. You get puppuccinos. Humans don't get puppuccinos."

Borges sat up, processing this profound revelation. "So… you're saying that while I am unjustly denied coffee, I am granted access to a secret elite beverage that humans can never enjoy?"

Pascal sighed, already exhausted. "Oh no. We're doing this now."

Borges' mood did a full 180. "And humans can't order puppuccinos for themselves?"

Álvaro shook his head. "Nope. Not unless they lie and say it's for their dog."

Borges' tail was now wagging at dangerous speeds. "So you, a mere human, must serve as my intermediary? My messenger? My emissary in the acquisition of a sacred beverage?"

Álvaro leaned back, smirking. "Correct."

Borges grinned like a madman. "This is power. This is justice. This is balance restored."

Pascal rolled onto his side in frustration. "I hate that this worked."

Borges stood proudly. "You think I am merely a dog. But in reality, I am the keeper of privileges beyond your reach."

Álvaro laughed. "Yeah, yeah. You gonna keep monologuing, or do you want some bacon?"

Borges immediately sat down, tail still wagging. "Bacon first. Puppuccino later. And then, perhaps, we discuss my rightful place as ruler of this household."

Pascal, glaring, muttered, "If you call me your royal advisor, I'm leaving."

Borges, still grinning, leaned in close. "You're not my advisor. You're my 42."

Pascal let out an exhausted groan and dramatically flopped onto the table.

Breakfast was going to be a long one.

The bacon sizzled, filling the kitchen with its rich, greasy aroma. Borges sat perfectly still, tail flicking in restrained excitement, while Pascal watched from the counter, looking utterly disinterested but too invested to leave.

Álvaro fried it.

They ate it.

And then, as the warmth of food settled in their stomachs, reality crept back in.

A dead man on the porch. A knife in his back.

Fake cops, or at least suspicious ones.

A car bomb.

Miss Petunia, gone.

Álvaro leaned back in his chair, rubbing his temples. "Nice."

Borges licked the last bit of bacon grease from his lips. "Yup."

Pascal, staring into the void, flicked his tail. "We are, in every measurable way, screwed."

Álvaro exhaled. "That tracks."

The three sat in contemplative silence, the existential weight of their situation settling over them like an old, worn-out blanket.

Then Borges perked up. "Sooo… what's the plan?"

Álvaro blinked. "Oh, I have no idea."

Pascal groaned. "Of course you don't."

Borges wagged his tail anyway. "Okay! So… wing it?"

Álvaro stretched, cracking his neck. "Hasn't failed me yet."

Pascal buried his face in his paws. "That is empirically false."

But it didn't matter.

Because Miss Petunia was gone. The dead man had left one word as a clue. And someone out there had already tried to kill them once.

Álvaro pushed his chair back, stood up, and tossed the last piece of bacon to Borges.

"Alright, boys. Let's go figure out who wants us dead."

Borges wagged his tail excitedly. "Road trip?"

Pascal sighed, jumping down from the counter. "God, I hate this."

But he followed anyway.

They packed the packable.

Edibles? Sealed in a Tupperware, stacked neatly next to leftover bacon.

Coffee? Álvaro filled a thermos. Pascal glared at him judgmentally.

Borges' favorite toy? Packed. He refused to travel without it.

A vague sense of purpose? …Debatable.

With no further planning, they piled into the car.

Álvaro in the driver's seat, Borges riding shotgun with his tongue hanging out, Pascal in the back, glaring out the window like a cat held hostage by the laws of motion.

Ignition. Engine rumbles. Wheels start rolling.

And then, half a block down the road—

"Wait."

Álvaro blinked.

Borges turned his head. "What?"

Pascal closed his eyes slowly. "Oh no."

Álvaro exhaled. "We didn't think of where we're going."

Silence.

Borges wagged his tail. "Well… forward seems like a good start?"

Álvaro gripped the wheel. "Yeah, but toward what?"

Pascal sighed heavily. "You absolute morons."

Álvaro rubbed his face. "Okay. Let's think."

Miss Petunia? Gone.

Dead guy? No ID, just one word: Prolegomena.

Fake cops? Probably watching the house.

Car bomb? Well, that happened.

Borges tilted his head. "What about the book? The Kant thing? Maybe we start there?"

Pascal rolled his eyes. "Yes, let's just casually drive up to the local library and ask if they have any copies of 'Hey, has this book ever gotten anyone stabbed in the back on someone's porch?'. That'll go well."

Álvaro drummed his fingers on the wheel. "Okay, sarcasm aside, we actually need a starting point."

Silence.

They sat there, idling, three geniuses with no plan, no direction, and a Tupperware full of questionable edibles.

Borges licked his nose. "Okay, hear me out—what if we just keep driving until something feels right?"

Pascal, still facepalming, muttered, "Oh yes, excellent strategy. Let fate decide. Maybe the universe will text us directions."

Álvaro tapped the steering wheel.

Then his eyes narrowed.

"Wait. Fate."

Pascal squinted. "Please tell me you're not about to say something stupid."

Álvaro grinned.

"Borges, pick a direction."

Borges perked up instantly. "Oh! Uh… left!"

Álvaro turned left.

Pascal looked physically ill. "I hate this already."

Álvaro kept going. "Alright, Borges. Next turn?"

Borges wiggled excitedly. "Right!"

Álvaro turned right.

Pascal hissed. "This is NOT how investigations work!"

Borges was having the time of his life. "Okay! Straight for a bit, then another left!"

Álvaro followed the instructions without hesitation.

Pascal stared out the window in absolute despair. "I'm trapped in a car with idiots."

Borges grinned. "Pascal, you gotta trust the process!"

Álvaro nodded. "Yeah, Pascal. The universe works in mysterious ways."

Pascal glared. "This isn't the universe. This is a dog with the attention span of a kitchen sponge giving directions based on whim."

And yet, they kept driving.

Until—

They passed the wreckage of the bombed car… and saw someone watching them.

A figure. Half-hidden behind a burnt-out streetlamp. Just for a second. Then gone.

Álvaro slammed the brakes.

Borges' tail stopped wagging.

Pascal's fur bristled.

Álvaro's grip on the wheel tightened. "Okay. Maybe Borges was onto something."

Pascal groaned. "I swear to god, if he just accidentally led us to a conspiracy, I'm never letting this go."

Borges wagged his tail again, but slower. "Sooo… follow them?"

Álvaro nodded, putting the car in gear.

"Follow them."

Álvaro gripped the wheel, eyes locked on the now-empty spot where the figure had stood. They were gone.

Borges sniffed the air, ears perked. "They went that way."

Álvaro didn't even question it. He hit the gas.

Pascal, already bracing for disaster, hissed. "And how exactly do you plan to follow a shadowy figure who is—let's recap—ON FOOT, when you are in a CAR?!"

Álvaro squinted. "By being clever."

Pascal groaned. "This is going to be the dumbest thing I've ever experienced."

Borges wagged his tail excitedly. "Faster, Álvaro! We'll cut them off!"

Álvaro gunned it, speeding through the charred remains of the bomb site.

Where? Where would they run?

Not back toward the explosion. Too risky.
Not into an open street. Too exposed.
Alleyways. Side streets. Shadows.

Álvaro veered hard right into the nearest narrow side street, tires skidding slightly on the worn asphalt. The street was dark, damp, and tight. No way a car should be here, but Álvaro didn't care.

Borges stood up on the seat, eyes scanning the side streets. "There! There!"

A figure darted through the next intersection.

Álvaro slammed the brakes, throwing the car into reverse and whipping the wheel around.

Pascal cursed loudly. "ARE WE ACTUALLY DOING A CAR CHASE IN A BACK ALLEY?!"

Borges was loving this. "FASTER! TURN LEFT!"

Álvaro swerved left, barely missing a stack of garbage bins. The alley twisted, getting tighter, but he could see them now—a silhouette sprinting ahead, looking back once before cutting through an old metal gate.

No time. No space. No way the car would fit through that gate.

Álvaro slammed the brakes. "Out. NOW."

They piled out.

Borges was first, sprinting ahead, barking once as he picked up the scent.

Álvaro right behind, feet hitting pavement fast.

Pascal, against his will, was flung onto Álvaro's shoulder as they ran. "I DID NOT AGREE TO THIS!"

They rushed through the gate just in time to see the figure slip into a rundown apartment complex, door slamming shut behind them.

Álvaro skidded to a stop. "Gotcha."

Borges wagged his tail excitedly. "Now what?"

Pascal wheezed. "We die, obviously."

Álvaro grinned. "Nah. We knock."

And before Pascal could scream about how bad of an idea that was, Álvaro strode up to the rusted, half-broken door—

—and knocked.

The door creaked open just enough to reveal a half-asleep Native American man standing there in nothing but a pair of old boxer shorts, scratching his buttcheek with the kind of slow,

deliberate energy that suggested he had zero concerns about the universe.

He blinked at Álvaro. Then at Borges. Then at Pascal.

Then back at Álvaro.

A long silence.

Then, with absolute neutrality, he said:

“Hoka hey, he?”

Álvaro, still catching his breath from the chase, had zero idea how to respond.

Borges wagged his tail hesitantly. "Uh… Hoka hey?"

The man nodded sagely, as if that was a fully acceptable answer.

Pascal, still draped over Álvaro's shoulder, muttered, "We have made a terrible mistake."

Álvaro rubbed his face. "Okay. Look. A guy just ran into this building. Dark jacket, moving fast. Probably looking guilty as hell. You see him?"

The man kept scratching his butt. "Mmm. Maybe. Maybe not."

Álvaro squinted. "Are you messing with me?"

The man yawned. "Man, I just woke up. I don't know what's real yet."

Borges tilted his head. "That's actually fair."

Álvaro exhaled. "Okay. We're looking for him. You cool with that?"

The man shrugged. "Ain't my problem." He stepped back, holding the door open. "If you wanna get stabbed in there, that's on you, man."

Pascal groaned. "Lovely. That's exactly what I wanted to hear."

Álvaro nodded, stepping inside. "Appreciate it."

As they passed, the man grinned slightly.

"Good day to die, he."

Borges wagged his tail. "Dude, that was metal as hell."

Pascal, still on full high-alert mode, muttered, "This is absolutely a trap."

Álvaro, stepping deeper into the dimly lit hallway, whispered back:

"Yeah. But it’s our trap now."

A shadow moved.

Fast. Too fast.

From behind an old dusty bookcase, a figure sprang forward—a blur of motion, darting past them before anyone could react.

Álvaro spun just in time to see them vault through the half-open window, their dark silhouette disappearing into the night.

Borges barked once. Pascal let out an irritated hiss.

Álvaro lunged for the window—too late. The street below was empty. The figure was gone.

Silence.

Then, from behind them, the Native American guy in his boxers sighed deeply.

“Yeah, I probably shoulda mentioned he was still in here.”

Álvaro rubbed his face. "Man, come on."

Borges wagged his tail. "Okay but that was cool."

Pascal stared at the bookcase. "Wait. Why was he behind a bookcase?"

Álvaro turned back to it.

A narrow gap where the figure had been hiding. A tiny trail of disturbed dust. And something…

Something left behind.

A small, folded slip of paper, wedged between the books.

Álvaro grabbed it, unfolded it.

Álvaro stared at the slip of paper in his hand.

"Prolegomena."

No address. No name. Just the same word the dead man had uttered. But Álvaro knew Kant's Prolegomena inside and out—this wasn't about philosophy. This was a message. A signal. A code.

Borges wagged his tail slowly. "Okay, so what's the play?"

Pascal, still glaring at the paper, flicked his tail. "The play is that we stop chasing cryptic nonsense and start demanding actual answers."

Álvaro nodded, pocketing the note. "Agreed. We stop reacting. We start forcing their hand."

Borges perked up. "Ooooh, are we about to become the problem?"

Álvaro grinned. "Oh yeah. It's time to make some noise."

Pascal sighed. "Fantastic. We've reached the 'let's piss off the people who planted a car bomb' phase. This will end so well."

Álvaro opened the car door, motioning for them to hop in. "Alright, next stop: the kind of place where people know things they shouldn't."

Borges hopped in eagerly. "A bar?"

Pascal, still resigned to his fate, jumped into the back seat. "Or a morgue. Because we're going to die."

Álvaro grinned, started the car, and hit the gas.

It was time to find out who else knew about this word—and why they wanted him dead for hearing it.

A Bar, A Contact, and A Bad Idea

Álvaro drove without hesitation, without a destination—only instinct. And instinct, in moments like this, always led to the same place: a bar where people knew things they shouldn't.

Borges sat up excitedly. "Are we going to a bar? We're totally going to a bar, right?"

Pascal, settling into his usual state of exasperation, muttered, "Yes. Because nothing bad ever happens when Álvaro walks into a bar looking for ‘answers.’"

Álvaro smirked. "Relax, Pascal. I know someone."

Pascal rolled his eyes. "Oh great. It’s always ‘I know someone.’ Never ‘Let’s use logic and caution.’"

Borges wagged his tail. "I like this plan. It sounds chaotic."

Álvaro turned down a side street, heading toward the kind of establishment where no one asked questions unless they already knew the

answers. The place had no sign, no listed name—just a red door that had been repainted so many times it looked like a textured crime scene.

He parked, turned off the engine, and turned to his companions.

"Alright. We go in, we don't start fights, we don't say too much, and we don't run out screaming unless absolutely necessary."

Pascal stared at him. "How is that even a rule? Why would we need to run out screaming?"

Álvaro unbuckled his seatbelt. "Life is unpredictable, Pascal."

Borges, already jumping out of the car, barked. "Alright! Let's go get into trouble!"
Inside the Red Door

The bar was dimly lit, the air thick with the smell of old wood, stale beer, and secrets. It was the kind of place where every surface had seen things that would make a confession booth weep.

At the far end of the room, behind a narrow wooden bar, stood Gus.

Gus was large, bald, and built like an industrial refrigerator. He had the expression of a man who had once been punched by life and decided to start punching back. He wiped a glass absently, glanced up, and when he saw Álvaro, he sighed.

"Oh, hell no."

Álvaro grinned, walking up to the bar. "Gus. I need information."

Gus set the glass down. "And I need you to stop showing up in my damn bar every time someone tries to kill you."

Borges hopped onto a barstool. "Hi, Gus!"

Gus nodded at Borges. "You, I like."

Pascal, settling onto a stool with the air of a cat already regretting his life choices, muttered, "We should leave before this ends in gunfire."

Álvaro leaned in. "Gus, I just need to know if anyone's been asking around about me. Or if anyone's been throwing around the word Prolegomena."

Gus froze. Just for a second. A moment so brief, so subtle, that most people wouldn't have caught it.

Álvaro caught it.

Gus resumed wiping the glass, his voice carefully neutral. "Nope. Haven't heard a thing."

Álvaro narrowed his eyes. "That was the worst lie I've heard all week."

Gus sighed, rubbing a hand over his bald head. "Listen, man. You don't want to be chasing this. Walk away."

Borges tilted his head. "We're not very good at that."

Gus grunted. "Yeah. I figured."

Álvaro leaned in closer. "Gus. Please."

A long silence. Then Gus sighed again, leaned forward, and lowered his voice.

"Alright. There's someone you need to talk to. But you're not gonna like it."

Pascal groaned. "I already don't like it."

Álvaro grinned. "Perfect. Where do I find them?"

Gus hesitated, then finally said one name.

"Bonaventure."

The room seemed colder suddenly.

Borges stopped wagging his tail. Pascal went completely still.

Álvaro's smile faded.

"Oh. Shit."

Gus nodded. "Yeah. Oh shit."

Because Bonaventure wasn't just a name.

Bonaventure was a problem.

And now, Álvaro had no choice but to find him.

The Bonaventure Problem

Álvaro sighed, rubbing his temples. "Of all the names you could've given me, Gus."

Gus shrugged. "I don't pick the players, I just pour the drinks."

Borges tilted his head. "Okay, but who is Bonaventure? And why do you both look like you just swallowed a landmine?"

Pascal groaned. "Because Bonaventure is not a person. Bonaventure is an event."

Álvaro leaned back against the bar, staring at the ceiling. "He's a fixer. Not the clean, professional kind—the kind you call when you need a problem to disappear in a way that makes other problems appear."

Gus nodded. "And if he's involved in whatever this Prolegomena mess is, it means one of two things. Either someone hired him to clean up after the dead guy on your porch…"

Álvaro sighed. "…or someone hired him to clean up me."

Silence.

Borges frowned. "That second option sucks."

Pascal flicked his tail. "Oh, good, you've finally noticed."

Álvaro rolled his shoulders, shaking off the weight of the implication. "Alright. So where do I find him?"

Gus hesitated. "You don't find Bonaventure. He finds you."

Álvaro arched an eyebrow. "That's cute, Gus, but I don't have time for theatrics."

Gus grunted, rubbing his bald head again. "I'm serious, man. No one walks up to Bonaventure and asks questions. He works in the space between deals, between problems. If you want to meet him, you don't look for him—you make yourself look like a problem worth his time."

Pascal groaned. "So, basically, we bait an apex predator and hope we're not the meal."

Álvaro grinned. "Now that I can do."

Borges wagged his tail. "Oh, I like this plan."

Pascal buried his face in his paws. "I hate everything about it."

Álvaro turned back to Gus. "What's the best way to get Bonaventure's attention?"

Gus sighed again, then pulled a matchbook from his pocket and slid it across the bar. On the inside, a single address.

A poker game. A bad one. The kind where people left either broke or bleeding.

Gus tapped the matchbook. "Go here. Stir the right kind of trouble. If Bonaventure is anywhere nearby, you won't have to find him—he'll come find you."

Álvaro picked up the matchbook, turning it in his fingers. "And what kind of trouble gets his attention?"

Gus smirked. "The expensive kind."

Álvaro grinned. "Perfect. Let's go make a scene."

Borges barked excitedly. Pascal groaned loudly.

And with that, they left the bar, heading straight toward the kind of night that ended in either information or an emergency room.

They walked out to the car. And... wait...

The Car That Wasn't Álvaro's

Álvaro stopped mid-step.

Borges froze. Pascal narrowed his eyes.

All three of them stared at the car.

A perfectly normal-looking vehicle, parked exactly where they had left it. A car they had driven here. A car they had been using all night.

And then, all at once, the realization hit.

It wasn't Álvaro's car.

Álvaro never owned a car.

Borges tilted his head. "Uh… whose car is this?"

Pascal's fur bristled. "Oh my God, we never even asked."

Álvaro rubbed his face. "Okay. Okay. Think."

They had gotten into this car like it was normal.

They had been driving it without issue.

But at no point did they actually question where the car had come from.

Borges sniffed the tires. "It smells… weird. Like it's been places we haven't."

Pascal, ears flattened, muttered, "We have been in a stolen car this entire time."

Álvaro stared at the keys in his hand. "Did we steal a car?"

Borges wagged his tail slowly. "I mean, I feel like we would have remembered that."

Pascal groaned. "Or did someone give it to us?"

The three of them stood there, the weight of this stupid, massive oversight sinking in.

Then Álvaro exhaled.

"Okay. We figure this out later. Right now, we still have a poker game to crash."

Borges nodded. "And we definitely keep an eye on this car."

Pascal grumbled. "I swear, if it explodes the next time we turn it on—"

Álvaro unlocked the door, slid into the driver's seat, and muttered:

"Wouldn't be the first time."

Borges and Pascal exchanged looks.

Then, cautiously, they got in.

And with that, they drove off—still no idea whose car they were in, but fully committed to whatever mess came next.

Álvaro shifted into reverse, smoothly backing out of the parking space—

—and then something massive slammed into the pavement exactly where the car had just been.

A human body.

Borges yelped. Pascal hissed. Álvaro slammed the brakes.

For a moment, nobody moved.

Then Borges, ears perked, whispered, "Uh… guys?"

Álvaro stared at the crumpled body on the asphalt. "Yeah, Borges?"

Borges slowly turned to him. "I think we just dodged a corpse."

Pascal, pressing himself against the back of the seat like he could phase through it, hissed, "Someone just fell out of the fucking sky!"

Álvaro, hand still gripping the gear shift, exhaled sharply. "Alright. We're getting out of the car now."

Borges nodded. "Good plan."

Pascal, still frozen in shock, muttered, "Bad plan."

Too late. Álvaro opened the door, stepping into the dimly lit alley, Borges bounding after him, nose twitching. Pascal remained in the car, glaring at them through the windshield like an exhausted babysitter.

The body was facedown, sprawled awkwardly on the pavement, limbs twisted unnaturally. No sound had come before the impact. No scream, no shout, just pure silence followed by a sickening crunch.

Álvaro tilted his head, scanning the rooftops above. Nothing.

Borges sniffed cautiously. "He's fresh."

Pascal, from the car, groaned. "What does that even mean?"

Álvaro knelt down, reaching for the body's collar, carefully turning him over.

And then he froze.

Because pinned to the man's jacket—right over his heart—was a scrap of paper.

A single word scrawled across it.

"Prolegomena."

Borges whispered. "Okay. That’s not great."

Pascal, from the safety of the backseat, screamed into his paws. "WE ARE LEAVING. RIGHT. NOW."

Álvaro, heart pounding, slowly stood back up.

The city around them was eerily quiet. No witnesses. No movement.

Just a corpse that had fallen from nowhere… carrying the same word that was already turning their lives inside out.

Álvaro took a deep breath.

Then he got back in the car.

Shifted into drive.

And without another word, they sped away into the night.

By nightfall, they had pulled into one of those U-shaped motels—the kind where the neon sign flickered ominously, the parking lot was cracked and empty, and each room had a single, grimy door with a number barely hanging onto it.

Álvaro killed the engine. They sat there for a moment, the silence thick.

Borges stared out the window. "I feel like we should talk about the whole corpse-falling-from-the-sky thing."

Pascal, curled up in the backseat, looking absolutely done with existence, muttered, "Or hear me out—let's not talk about it. Let's

pretend we live normal lives where bodies don't drop from nowhere carrying cryptic Kantian messages."

Álvaro rubbed his face. "I don't think pretending is an option anymore."

Borges hopped out first, sniffing the air, his tail flicking. "No weird smells. That's a good start."

Álvaro stepped out next, stretching out the tension in his shoulders. They had been driving for hours, spiraling further into a mess he didn't understand but somehow couldn't walk away from.

Pascal, still grumbling, leapt onto Álvaro's shoulder as they walked toward the motel room.

"If this place has bed bugs, I am never forgiving you."

Álvaro unlocked the door, pushed it open, and—

The motel room was exactly as depressing as expected.

A single bed with a quilt that had seen too many things.

A cheap wooden desk with one leg slightly shorter than the others.

A bathroom door hanging slightly off its hinges.

A TV older than civilization itself.

Borges hopped onto the bed immediately, making himself at home. Pascal chose the desk, curling up with an air of disgust.

Álvaro locked the door, pulling the blinds shut.

Then he sat on the edge of the bed, elbows on his knees, staring at the floor.

The word "Prolegomena" burned in his mind.

A dead man on his porch. A fake police investigation. A car bomb. Miss Petunia, gone. A corpse falling from the damn sky.

And still no answers.

Borges, watching him, wagged his tail. "You thinking about the poker game?"

Álvaro nodded. "Yeah. If Bonaventure is in this, we need to know why. And we need leverage."

Pascal sighed. "And the only way to get leverage is to make ourselves even more of a problem than we already are."

Álvaro grinned. "Exactly."

Borges barked once. "Alright. When do we crash this poker game?"

Álvaro leaned back against the headboard, staring at the ceiling.

"Tomorrow night. But first, we get some sleep."

Pascal huffed, curling tighter on the desk. "I can’t believe this is my life."

Borges yawned, already settling in. "I can. This is exactly the kind of trouble Álvaro attracts."

Álvaro closed his eyes. But even as exhaustion pulled at him, his mind kept turning.

Somewhere out there, someone was making moves.

And tomorrow, they'd make their own.

Sleep wasn't happening. Not with a corpse dropping out of the sky. Not with Bonaventure looming on the horizon. Not with Miss Petunia gone, Prolegomena circling like a vulture, and the feeling that they were missing something—something huge.

Álvaro sighed, sat up, and reached for the Tupperware.

Click. Lid off.

Borges perked up. "Ohhh. Is it time?"

Pascal, half-asleep on the desk, cracked one eye open. "Oh great. More metaphysical nonsense incoming."

Álvaro grabbed a piece, popped it into his mouth, and chewed slowly. He offered one to Borges, who took it gleefully, tail wagging. Pascal, after a long, judging sigh, stretched and leapt onto the bed.

"Fine." He took a tiny corner, nibbled it, and flicked his tail irritably. "But if I start

questioning the fundamental nature of reality again, that's on you."

Álvaro leaned back against the headboard, staring at the ceiling.

They waited.

And then it hit.

Slow. Heavy. Warm. The world softened at the edges.

Borges flopped onto his back. "Ohhh yeah. Here we go."

Pascal blinked slowly. "…Is the air vibrating, or is that just me?"

Álvaro rubbed his face. "Guys."

Borges snorted. "Yeah?"

Álvaro tilted his head. "What if… Prolegomena isn't a warning?"

Pascal squinted. "Oh no. No, no, no. Not again. We are NOT going down this road."

Álvaro sat up, fully engaged now. "No, listen. What if it's not just a message? What if it's… a map?"

Silence.

Then Borges gasped. "DUDE."

Pascal groaned. "This is exactly what I was afraid of."

Álvaro was spiraling now. "We keep treating it like a word, but what if it's pointing us somewhere? Like a breadcrumb trail? Kant wasn't just setting up philosophy—he was setting up a framework. What if whoever is behind this is doing the same thing?"

Borges, eyes wide, whispered. "A conceptual treasure hunt."

Pascal covered his face with his paws. "God, you're both insufferable."

Álvaro grabbed his notebook, scribbling furiously. "What if the answer isn't in what Prolegomena is, but in where it's leading us?"

Borges wiggled excitedly. "Okay, okay, okay. But… where?"

Álvaro stared at the notebook, the words blurring together slightly.

And then Pascal, against his better judgment, sighed and muttered:

"Well… if it's a breadcrumb trail, then we just need to find the next crumb."

Silence.

Then Álvaro grinned.

"Exactly."

Álvaro, halfway between philosophical revelation and total couch-lock, suddenly sat up straight.

"Dude."

Borges, sprawled on his back, tail wagging slowly, turned his head. "Yeah?"

Álvaro blinked. "Nuns say they're married to Jesus, right?"

Pascal, already regretting existing in this exact moment, groaned. "Oh no."

Álvaro leaned forward, hands gesturing wildly. "That means Jesus is… a polygamist."

Silence.

Borges whispered. "Duuuuuuuuude."

Pascal rolled onto his side, covering his face. "This is why I don't eat edibles."

Álvaro, fully committed now, kept going. "Like, how does that even work? Are all the nuns co-wives? Do they share a celestial timeshare? Is there a divine waiting list?"

Borges nodded solemnly. "And what about the afterlife? Like, when they die, do they get to move into the big eternal mansion with all the other nun-wives?"

Pascal, tail flicking aggressively, hissed. "STOP."

Álvaro ignored him completely. "And if Jesus is married to every nun—does that mean there's, like, one nun out there who was the first wife? The head nun? The original Mrs. Christ?"

Borges gasped. "THE QUEEN NUN."

Pascal let out a slow, pained exhale. "I cannot believe I have to listen to this."

Álvaro snapped his fingers. "And what about monks? Are they, like, spiritually single? Or are they in some kind of divine bachelor pad?"

Borges wagged his tail. "Monk frat house?"

Álvaro gasped. "BROTHERHOOD OF THE HOLY BACHELORS."

Pascal, digging his claws into the blanket, groaned louder. "We were supposed to be solving a mystery."

Borges, completely lost to the theory now, sat up. "WAIT. What if the real reason priests can't get married is because Jesus called dibs on all the brides?"

Álvaro froze.

Stared at him.

Borges stared back.

Then, at the exact same time—

"OH MY GOD."

Pascal, flopping onto his side in absolute despair, muttered. "Please, let the car explode and take me with it."

Álvaro grabbed his notebook.

This needed to be documented.

While Álvaro and Borges were deep in their unhinged theological breakdown, Pascal was… watching TV.

A TV that was off.

The screen was black. No signal. No static. Just a lifeless reflection of the dim motel room.

And yet, Pascal stared.

His tail flicked. His ears twitched as if he were actually following something.

At one point, he even lifted the remote, pressed a button, and nodded as if approving the new channel.

Álvaro, mid-sentence about the Nun Divorce Rate in Heaven, suddenly noticed.

"…Pascal?"

Pascal, not breaking eye contact with the void-screen, muttered, "Busy."

Borges, ears perking up, turned to look. "Uh. Buddy? The TV's off."

Pascal tilted his head. "It's not off for me."

Silence.

Álvaro blinked. "Dude, what the hell are you watching?"

Pascal slowly, without blinking, whispered.

"Something's watching us."

Borges yelped.

Álvaro lunged for the remote, mashing buttons—nothing happened.

Pascal sighed dramatically. "And now you changed the channel. Great."

Álvaro stared at him. "Are you fucking with me, or are you actually seeing something?"

Pascal, eyes still locked on the dark screen, flicked his tail. "Let's just say… if I were human, I'd be screaming right now."

Borges whimpered. "So, uh… we're safe though, right?"

Pascal didn't respond immediately.

Then, finally, he turned to Álvaro.

"Remember when I said we should leave before this turned into a horror movie?"

Álvaro nodded slowly.

Pascal turned back to the dark screen.

"Congratulations. It's officially a horror movie."

The TV remained off.

And yet··· something crawled out of it.

A girl. Pale, with long, black hair covering her face, moving in that unnatural, jerky way that suggested she had absolutely no business being in the real world.

She dragged herself onto the motel floor, her fingers scraping against the wood. A whispery, wet sound. Something unholy.

And absolutely nobody noticed.

Because at that exact moment, Borges was deep into a metaphysical spiral.

"Duuude." Borges stretched out on the bed, his eyes glassy. "What if we can't know reality? Like, what if all we ever perceive is just our idea of reality?"

Álvaro rubbed his temples. "Borges, we are way too high for epistemology."

Pascal, still watching the TV-That-Was-Off like it contained the meaning of life, flicked his tail. "Oh good. Here we go. Another night of you two having a stoner breakdown about perception."

The girl inched closer. Her limbs bent at angles that shouldn't exist. The air grew cold.

Borges sat up suddenly. "No, no, think about it. Kant says we can never actually perceive the thing-in-itself. We just experience the phenomena of things—the mental construct, not the thing itself."

Álvaro leaned in. "Right. Which means we don't actually interact with reality—we interact with our interpretation of reality."

Pascal groaned. "Fantastic. We've entered the part of the night where reality itself is up for debate."

The girl's fingers curled around Borges' tail. Her head tilted sharply.

Nobody reacted.

Borges kept going. "So, if we can't ever know reality directly, then how do we know anything is real?"

Álvaro snapped his fingers. "And that's Descartes' problem! Cogito ergo sum. The only thing I can be sure of is that I think—because even if I'm deceived, the act of doubt proves that something must be doing the doubting!"

Borges wagged his tail, completely oblivious to the ghost girl currently gripping it. "Right! But that only proves you exist. It doesn't prove that I exist! Or Pascal! Or the TV!"

Pascal, rolling onto his side, groaned loudly. "I swear, if I had thumbs, I would turn this car around and go home."

The girl hesitated.

Her breathing hitched.

She wasn’t moving anymore.

Álvaro pointed at Borges. "And THAT is solipsism! The idea that we can only ever be sure of our own mind! Everything else? Could be an illusion."

Borges gasped. "Bro. What if we are the illusion?"

Pascal slammed his paws over his face. "We. Are. Not. The. Illusion."

The girl stared at them.

Her twisted fingers trembled.

Then, slowly, she let go of Borges' tail.

Without a sound—without so much as a whisper—she turned around and crawled back into the TV.

The screen flickered briefly, then went completely dark.

Silence.

Then Borges stretched, yawning. "Man, that was a good talk."

Álvaro nodded. "Yeah. I feel like we got somewhere."

Pascal slowly peeked from between his paws. "Did··· did we just philosophize an actual horror entity into existential despair?"

Borges wagged his tail. "I'd say that was a productive night."

The TV remained off.

And somewhere, inside it, a ghost girl was reconsidering her entire afterlife.

For the first time in what felt like weeks, Álvaro, Borges, and Pascal had a dreamless, uninterrupted night of sleep.

No corpses falling from the sky. No cryptic words haunting their thoughts. No ghosts

crawling out of the TV only to be philosophically shattered into the void.

Just pure, uninterrupted rest.

And when they woke up…

They were all craving hot dogs.

Álvaro rubbed his face, stretched, and groaned. "Why do I want a hot dog so badly?"

Borges, already awake, sitting up on the bed, tail wagging, barked happily. "Dude. Hot dogs? Yes. Yes to everything about that idea."

Pascal, from his spot on the desk, cracked an eye open and muttered, "Borges, not hot in that way. Lower your expectations."

Borges pouted. "That was uncalled for."

Álvaro sat up, blinking away the last remnants of sleep. "Alright. New mission: breakfast. And by breakfast, I mean questionable motel-district hot dogs."

Borges jumped off the bed, fully invested in this plan. "This is the best idea you've had since bacon."

Pascal stretched dramatically. "I can't believe we're actually going to seek out processed mystery meat before we address the fact that we're still tangled in a conspiracy."

Álvaro grabbed his coat. "Conspiracies can wait. Hot dogs can't."

And with that, they piled into their still-unexplained car and drove off in search of the perfectly greasy, questionably sourced, absolutely necessary hot dog stand.

Álvaro opened the motel door —then froze.

Something was pinned to the wood.

A single piece of paper, stabbed into the door with a rusty screwdriver, the handle still slightly tilted, as if it had been placed there not long ago.

One word.

"GET!"

Borges tilted his head. "Uh… Get what?"

Pascal, eyes narrowing, flicked his tail. "Not ‘get what.’ ‘Get out.’ It’s a warning."

Álvaro exhaled through his nose. He reached up, yanked the screwdriver out, and pulled the note free, turning it over. No other messages. No signatures. Just the single, sharp command.

He held it up for them to see. "Well. That’s direct."

Borges wagged his tail cautiously. "Okay, but are we actually leaving, or are we ignoring the ominous horror-movie warning like idiots?"

Pascal sighed. "We are absolutely ignoring it like idiots."

Álvaro folded the note, tucked it into his pocket, and smirked. "Obviously."

Borges barked once. "Cool. Just checking."

Pascal groaned. "We are going to die for hot dogs."

Álvaro twirled the screwdriver in his hand, thinking. Whoever left this had been here recently. The blade was still wedged deep, no dust or grime in the creases of the paper.

Someone was watching.

Well, If They're Watching…

Álvaro squinted at the horizon. The note, the screwdriver, the fact that someone had been right here and might still be watching…

Well.

Let them watch.

With zero hesitation, zero thought, and zero shame, Álvaro turned, hooked his thumbs into his waistband, and dropped his pants.

Full moon.

No hesitation. No regrets.

Borges burst out laughing. Pascal let out a long, suffering sigh.

And then—

A horrified gasp.

Álvaro, still mid-moon, glanced over his shoulder.

And saw—

A mother and two young children standing just outside the opposite motel room.

All three of them frozen in horror.

The mother covered the kids' eyes immediately, shrieking. "WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH YOU?!"

The younger child burst into tears. The older one just stared in silent trauma.

Borges fell to the ground, howling with laughter. Pascal faceplanted onto the car hood. "I hate everything about this moment."

Álvaro, realizing his mistake, quickly yanked his pants back up. "Oh, uh, sorry. That wasn't for you. That was—uh—"

The mother pointed aggressively. "GET SOME HELP."

She grabbed the kids, ushered them into their car, and peeled out of the parking lot as fast as humanly possible.

Borges, wheezing from laughter, barely managed to speak. "Dude. You just psychologically damaged those kids for life."

Pascal, still face-down, muttered. "We are leaving immediately. I do not care about hot dogs anymore."

Álvaro, shrugging, muttered, "Worth it."

And with that, they got the hell out of there.

The hot dog vendor was walking home, cart rattling softly as he navigated the quiet streets.

It had been a good night—clubs were packed, drunk people were generous, and nothing fueled capitalism like the midnight munchies.

He was almost home when—

"HEY! HEY, YOU!"

He barely had time to turn around before a disheveled man, a panting dog, and a cat glaring from his shoulder stopped him mid-sidewalk.

Álvaro, eyes wild with hunger, leaned in. "How many have you got left?"

The vendor blinked. "Uh… what?"

Borges wagged his tail aggressively. "HOT. DOGS. How many?"

Pascal, deadpan, sighed. "Forgive them. They've lost control of their lives."

The vendor, still thrown off by being accosted in the middle of the night, hesitated before finally checking his cart.

Two.

Two lone, slightly crushed hot dogs, sitting in the corner of the warmer.

The vendor sighed. He had planned on eating them himself, but these people looked… desperate.

Álvaro held up a hand. "We'll take them both. Name your price."

The vendor squinted. "You're that guy from the motel who mooned those kids, aren't you?"

Borges snorted violently. Pascal facepalmed.

Álvaro, unfazed, muttered, "That was an unfortunate misunderstanding."

The vendor, already tired, sighed. "Fifteen bucks."

Álvaro didn't even haggle. He just shoved a crumpled twenty into the guy's hand, grabbed both hot dogs, and immediately handed one to Borges.

Pascal flicked his tail. "I notice you didn't get me one."

Álvaro bit into his, talking through the food. "You hate hot dogs."

Pascal huffed. "That's beside the point."

Borges, already halfway through his hot dog, let out an audible groan of pleasure. "Duuuuude. I was born for this moment."

The vendor, counting his money, muttered, "You guys are weird as hell."

Álvaro chewed, swallowed, and grinned. "You have no idea."

And with that, the trio walked off into the night, finally full, finally satisfied… and still absolutely no closer to solving the mystery that was going to get them all killed.

As Álvaro, Borges, and Pascal finished their late-night hot dog hunt, the reality of their situation settled back in.

Miss Petunia was gone.

A man had died on their porch with Prolegomena as his last word.

The police were probably fake.

A car bomb had nearly taken them out.

A corpse had literally fallen from the sky.

Someone had left a note telling them to GET!

And now, Bonaventure—the fixer, the problem-solver, the walking complication—was their next lead.

Borges, licking the last of the hot dog grease from his lips, wagged his tail. "So… we're still

doing the whole ‘poke the scary fixer until he talks to us’ plan, right?"

Álvaro wiped his hands on his coat and nodded. "Yup. Gus said we can’t find Bonaventure—he finds us. So we make sure we’re too loud for him to ignore."

Pascal, tail flicking, muttered. "Great. Because what’s life without making ourselves even more of a target?"

Álvaro grinned. "Exactly."

The Plan

They needed to cause the kind of trouble that would make Bonaventure take notice.

Something big enough to force him out of the shadows.

Step 1: Crash the Poker Game

Gus's lead. A high-stakes game filled with the kind of people who know things they shouldn't.

If Bonaventure wasn't there, someone would be.

Step 2: Make a Scene

Play. Win. Lose. Doesn't matter.

Get people talking.

Let word spread that Álvaro is asking questions about the wrong things.

Step 3: Get Bonaventure to Come to Them

If he was cleaning up this mess, he'd have to deal with them eventually.

They just had to make sure he had no other choice.

Borges wagged his tail. "I like this plan. It's dangerous and dumb."

Álvaro stretched, cracking his neck. "That's how you know it's good."

Pascal, sighing deeply, hopped onto Álvaro's shoulder. "I hate both of you. Let's go."

Final Decision: No More Running

They had spent the past day reacting—dodging, escaping, and getting tangled in a web they didn't understand.

Now?

They were going to push back.

They got into the mystery car (which was still unexplained, but one problem at a time), and Álvaro started the engine.

"Alright, boys. Let's go stir up some trouble."

And with that, they headed toward the poker game—toward Bonaventure—toward whatever mess was waiting for them next.

The drive was quiet but charged, the kind of silence that only comes when everyone knows they're about to do something deeply, profoundly stupid.

The poker game Gus had mentioned was in a warehouse-turned-backroom-casino, the kind of place where people played with cash, watches, land deeds, or bullets—depending on how the night went.

Álvaro pulled the mystery car into a gravel lot, cut the engine, and turned to Borges and Pascal.

"Alright. Last chance to back out."

Borges wagged his tail. "You kidding? I live for this chaos."

Pascal sighed. "I resign myself to fate."

Álvaro grinned. "Perfect."

They stepped out.

The building was quiet, but not the empty kind of quiet—the calculated kind. A single red light buzzed above a metal door, casting deep shadows.

A man stood outside, built like a human refrigerator, arms crossed, watching them approach.

"Invitation?" the guy grunted.

Álvaro smirked, patted his pockets. "Oh, you know how these things go. Got lost, found my way here. Think I'll try my luck."

The guy squinted.

Pascal whispered. "Great. We're winging it."

Álvaro tapped his temple. "Always."

The bouncer exhaled sharply through his nose, sizing him up, then nodded toward Borges. "The dog stays outside."

Borges tilted his head. "Excuse me?"

Álvaro, not even blinking, said, "Non-negotiable."

A beat.

Then the bouncer—either deeply exhausted or just not paid enough to care—grunted and stepped aside.

"Your problem, pal."

Álvaro grinned and walked in.

Borges trotted beside him.

Pascal, still clinging to his shoulder, muttered, "This is the dumbest thing we've ever done."

Álvaro smirked. "And it's only getting dumber."

Inside the Game

The air was thick with cigarette smoke, the scent of whiskey and sweat lingering between half-lit chandeliers and the dull hum of conversation.

Several tables were scattered around the room, each one filled with players who either looked too rich to be here or too dangerous to be broke.

The game was serious. The kind where people didn't fold hands—they folded other people.

Álvaro walked in like he belonged. He didn't hesitate, didn't pause—just scanned the room, looking for the right table to make a scene.

Borges whispered, "So who are we trying to piss off?"

Pascal huffed. "The better question is who are we trying not to get shot by?"

Álvaro's eyes landed on a table near the back. A group of four men, one woman, all of them too calm, too calculated.

And in the middle—

A stack of cash. A gold pocket watch. A set of car keys.

A single bullet.

Álvaro grinned. "That one."

Borges wagged his tail. "Perfect."

Pascal closed his eyes. "I hate my life."

Álvaro walked up, pulled out a chair, and sat down.

The players looked up.

The man closest to him—a lean guy with sharp eyes and a suit that looked like it had been stolen off a corpse—raised an eyebrow.

"You lost?"

Álvaro smirked. "Not yet."

He reached into his coat, pulled out a wad of cash he definitely couldn't afford to lose, and tossed it onto the table.

"Deal me in."

And just like that, the game began.
The Problem with Poker

Álvaro knew how to play. But this wasn't about winning.

It was about getting noticed.

It was about making noise.

It was about forcing Bonaventure's hand.

The first few hands? Small talk. Casual plays.

Then Álvaro started getting reckless.

He raised when he should've folded. He pushed when he should've waited.

And it didn't go unnoticed.

The players started watching him differently. The room started feeling smaller.

Borges, lying under the table, whispered, "Uh… they're catching on."

Pascal, curled up on Álvaro's lap, muttered, "He knows. The guy in the suit—he's testing you."

Álvaro didn't look. Didn't react. Just smiled and threw another bet onto the pile.

The man in the suit narrowed his eyes.

Then, finally, he leaned back and said,

"You don't belong here."

Silence.

Álvaro smirked, tossing back his drink. "Neither do half the people in this room. But here we are."

The man exhaled slowly. Then he turned to the dealer, gave a small nod.

And just like that—

The game stopped.

The dealer stood up. The other players pushed their chairs back.

Álvaro tilted his head. "So, is this the part where I win a prize?"

The man in the suit smirked. "Yeah."

He pulled something out of his jacket—

A scrap of paper.

He slid it across the table.

Álvaro picked it up.

A single name.

"Bonaventure."

And below it—

An address.

Borges grinned. "Ohhh, we're in now."

Pascal groaned. "I hate that this is working."

Álvaro stood, pocketing the note.

"Pleasure playing with you, gentlemen."

The man in the suit smirked. "Enjoy your prize while you can."

Álvaro tipped an imaginary hat, turned, and walked out.

Because now?

Now they had a way to Bonaventure.

And things were about to get even worse.

The trio piled into the mystery car, the address in Álvaro's pocket like a ticking bomb.

Borges sat up in the passenger seat, tail wagging. "Alright, let's talk strategy. What's the plan when we meet this guy?"

Álvaro, starting the engine, smirked. "We wing it."

Pascal groaned loudly from the backseat. "Of course we are. Because why plan anything when we can just barrel toward certain death with no preparation?"

Borges grinned. "It's more exciting this way."

The car rumbled down the road, the city lights blurring as they moved toward the outskirts. The address wasn't downtown—it was tucked away in a forgotten industrial zone, the kind of place no one went unless they had no choice.

As they drove, the weight of it all settled in.

Whoever Bonaventure was, he wasn't just dangerous—he was involved.

If Bonaventure was cleaning up this mess, it meant the stakes were higher than they realized.

And if he'd been hired to clean them up, well…

Borges broke the silence. "What if he's expecting us? Like, what if this address is a trap?"

Álvaro nodded slowly. "Good chance of that."

Pascal flicked his tail. "And yet, here we are. Driving right into it."

Álvaro grinned. "Exactly."

Pascal muttered under his breath, "Idiots. I'm surrounded by idiots."

The Address

The car pulled up to a nondescript building, surrounded by rusting fences and broken streetlights. A single, dim light buzzed over the door, casting jagged shadows on the cracked pavement.

Álvaro killed the engine.

The three sat in silence for a moment, staring at the building.

"Well," Borges finally said, "this looks friendly."

Pascal, perched on Álvaro's shoulder as he stepped out, hissed softly. "This place feels… wrong. Like something happened here."

Álvaro scanned the area. No cameras. No guards. Just a building too quiet for its own good.

He reached for the door handle—

It wasn't locked.

Of course it wasn't locked.

He pushed it open slowly.
Inside

The room was dark and empty, save for a single table in the center, lit by a bare bulb hanging from the ceiling.

On the table?

A phone.

Álvaro frowned. "What the hell is this?"

Borges sniffed the air, his ears twitching. "This feels… off."

Pascal whispered, "It's bait. Don't touch it."

Álvaro ignored him, walking toward the table. The phone's screen lit up as he approached.

A message appeared.

"Answer."

Álvaro hesitated for a moment, then picked up the phone.

The line clicked.

A voice, calm and measured, spoke.

"Álvaro Diderot. I was wondering when you'd show up."

Álvaro's grip tightened. "Bonaventure, I assume?"

The voice chuckled softly. "That depends on who's asking. But if it's about the dead man on your porch, the car bomb, or the word

Prolegomena, then yes. I'm the one you're looking for."

Álvaro didn't blink. "Good. Then let's cut the bullshit. Who's pulling the strings?"

The voice paused, then said, "You don't get to ask questions, Mr. Diderot. You get to listen. Carefully."

Silence.

Then: "You have no idea what you're involved in. But you've made yourself a problem. And I don't clean up problems—I eliminate them."

Borges growled softly. Pascal hissed.

Álvaro smirked. "Big words for someone hiding behind a phone."

The voice chuckled again. "Brave. Stupid, but brave. That's why they wanted you gone in the first place."

Álvaro stiffened. "They?"

The voice ignored him. "Here's how this goes: you drop the trail, disappear, and live the rest of your life quietly. Or…"

The line went dead.

Then the building's lights flickered.

And they weren't alone anymore.

Footsteps echoed from the hallway behind them.

Borges barked once. "Uh, guys? Company."

Pascal muttered, "I told you it was a trap."

Álvaro dropped the phone, fists clenched. "Let's see how much Bonaventure really wants us gone."

The footsteps grew louder.

It was time to face the music.

The footsteps got closer—steady, deliberate, unhurried.

Álvaro turned slowly, stepping back from the table, eyes locked on the darkened hallway ahead.

Borges stood beside him, hackles raised, tail stiff. Pascal clung to his shoulder, body tense.

The air shifted.

Not just in the physical sense—something in the atmosphere tilted, like the moment before a storm breaks.

Then, from the darkness—a figure emerged.

Tall. Broad-shouldered. Clean-shaven. Wearing a suit that looked just a little too crisp for a man in a dead-end industrial building.

He adjusted his cuffs as he stepped into the dim light, then smirked.

"Diderot."

Álvaro didn't blink. "Bonaventure."

The man tilted his head, amused. "And here I thought you'd be smarter than this."

Álvaro shrugged. "Turns out I have poor impulse control."

Bonaventure chuckled, then nodded toward Borges. "The dog, I get. But the cat? That's unexpected."

Pascal, deadpan, whispered. "If he says 'I hate cats' I'm clawing his eyes out."

Bonaventure ignored him.

He stepped forward, hands in his pockets, calm, composed, like a man who had already won the game.

Álvaro, however, wasn't playing by his rules.

"You went through a lot of effort to get me here," he said. "So let's cut the theatrics. Who do you work for?"

Bonaventure smiled.

And then—the door behind them slammed shut.

Álvaro didn’t turn. Didn’t react. But Borges let out a low growl, body shifting closer to Álvaro.

They were locked in.

Bonaventure exhaled, as if disappointed. "You keep asking the wrong questions, Diderot."

Álvaro gritted his teeth. "Then give me the right ones."

Bonaventure smirked again. "Fine. Try this: why was the man on your porch trying to reach you?"

A pause.

Borges blinked. Pascal flicked his tail.

Álvaro’s stomach dropped.

Because—that wasn't a question he had considered.

He had been too busy thinking about who killed him. Too busy dodging bombs, notes, and cryptic warnings to wonder—

Why was the dead man coming to him in the first place?

Bonaventure saw the realization hit. He nodded approvingly. "Now you're starting to get it."

Álvaro narrowed his eyes. "So you know."

Bonaventure chuckled. "I know many things."

Álvaro took a calculated step forward. "Then tell me why he was looking for me."

Bonaventure sighed, rubbing his temples. "You think I'm here to answer your questions? No, Diderot. I'm here to see if you're worth keeping alive."

Borges tensed. Pascal hissed softly.

Álvaro's grip on the screwdriver in his pocket tightened.

Bonaventure smiled.

And then—the lights cut out completely.

Total darkness.

And the fight began.

The room plunged into pitch-blackness.

For a second, silence.

Then—a rush of movement.

A fist swung through the dark—Álvaro ducked instinctively, dropping to a knee.

Borges barked—a warning. Pascal, somewhere in the chaos, hissed.

Álvaro moved by instinct, jabbing out with the screwdriver in his pocket. It hit something—cloth, muscle—but Bonaventure was fast, twisting away.

A punch grazed Álvaro's ribs—then another, harder, catching him in the side.

He grunted, staggered, but stayed standing.

"That all you got?" he hissed into the dark.

A laugh from somewhere in the blackness. "You don't get it, Diderot."

A hand grabbed his shoulder—he twisted away.

Borges leaped, jaws snapping—a yelp of surprise.

Then—a sound from behind them.

A door unlocking.

Then Bonaventure's voice, from somewhere deeper in the dark.

"This isn't over."

A faint creak. A rush of footsteps.

And then—light flooded back in.

Álvaro blinked against the sudden brightness.

Bonaventure was gone.

The door at the back of the room stood slightly ajar.

Borges growled. Pascal, fur bristling, muttered. "That was awful."

Álvaro, still catching his breath, wiped blood from the corner of his mouth. "Yeah. But we learned something."

Borges tilted his head. "What?"

Álvaro took a deep breath.

"The dead guy was looking for me."

A pause.

Pascal flicked his tail. "Which means?"

Álvaro grinned, despite the pain.

"Which means I know something they don't want me to remember."

And now?

They just had to figure out what it was.

Acrid smoke filled the air, curling up from the back rooms, thick and suffocating.

Borges snapped his head toward the heat. "Uh. Guys?"

Pascal, eyes wide, tail puffed, hissed. "We are LEAVING. NOW."

Álvaro didn’t hesitate.

The flames were spreading fast, licking at the wooden beams, crawling along the floor like a living thing. Bonaventure didn’t just escape—he set the place to burn behind him.

Classic.

Álvaro grabbed Borges' collar, scooped Pascal onto his shoulder, and ran.
No Way Out—Except One

The main door was locked.

Of course it was.

The heat was unbearable now, smoke thick enough to turn the air to tar in their lungs.

Álvaro coughed, covering his mouth with his sleeve. "We need another exit!"

Borges was already moving, nose low, tail stiff.

"Window!" he barked, darting toward the far side of the room.

Álvaro followed, choking through the haze. The window was grimy, cracked—but still intact.

"Stand back."

Borges jumped clear. Pascal clung to Álvaro's shoulder like a terrified demon.

Álvaro grabbed the closest thing he could find—a chair, heavy and half-broken—and swung.

Glass shattered.

Wind rushed in, feeding the flames.

No time to think.

Álvaro climbed onto the ledge, turned, grabbed Borges by the collar, and shoved him through first.

Borges hit the ground hard, rolled, and barked. "I'm good!"

Pascal dug his claws into Álvaro's jacket. "I am GOING TO DIE."

Álvaro jumped.

The landing was rough, but better than burning alive. He hit the ground, rolled, and felt Pascal's claws dig into his shoulder.

Borges was already up. "RUN!"

They bolted, smoke curling out of the shattered window behind them, the heat pressing at their backs.

The warehouse groaned, metal and wood giving way. The fire was spreading faster than it should.

This wasn't just an escape tactic.

This was a purge.

Streetlights. Breathing Hard. Nobody Waiting.

They stumbled into the alley, lungs burning, hearts racing.

No sirens. No footsteps.

Just them, panting under flickering streetlights, watching the building crumble.

Pascal, still clinging to Álvaro, whispered. "That was way too fast. That fire was… wrong."

Borges, ears pinned back, nodded. "Accelerant. Someone wanted this place gone."

Álvaro wiped sweat from his brow, exhaling slowly.

Bonaventure didn't just escape. He erased every trace of whatever was in there.

Which meant whatever they were chasing was bigger than they thought.

Borges looked up at him. "So what now?"

Álvaro gritted his teeth, eyes locked on the smoldering ruins.

"Now? We find out what they were trying to burn."

As they stood catching their breath, ashen and rattled, the surrealness of the night only deepened.

A dwarf girl with orange and pink hair strolled into view.

She wore a mismatched outfit—something between punk rock and circus chic—and carried herself like she owned the whole damn street.

Without breaking stride, she stopped, turned toward them, and—

Flashed them.

Borges froze mid-tail wag. Pascal hissed in pure, reflexive disbelief. Álvaro blinked.

The girl grinned, unbothered by the utter chaos she had just caused.

"Memento mori," she said, her voice light and melodic.

And then, just as casually as she'd appeared, she walked away, her neon-colored hair bouncing as if nothing at all unusual had just happened.

Silence.

Borges broke it first. "Did… did that just happen?"

Pascal, still bristling, muttered, "No. That did not happen. We're hallucinating. It's the smoke. Or the edibles."

Álvaro, finally snapping out of it, rubbed his temples. "Nope. That happened."

Borges tilted his head. "What does memento mori even mean?"

Álvaro, still staring after the girl, muttered, "It means 'remember you will die.'"

Pascal groaned. "Fantastic. More cryptic nonsense. Exactly what we needed."

Borges wagged his tail slowly. "Okay, but… was she part of this? Or was that just… random?"

Álvaro sighed. "At this point, I'm not ruling anything out."

And with that, they turned back to the smoldering ruins of the building, their night somehow even more complicated than it already was.

Álvaro stood there, watching the fire die down, smoke curling into the night sky like a farewell letter to common sense.

The warehouse was gone. Bonaventure was gone. The answers were gone.

And now?

Now some half-punk dwarf girl had flashed them, whispered an existential warning, and vanished into the night like a neon fever dream.

Álvaro exhaled sharply, tipping his head back.

"Well, dear Grim Reaper, here we are. Come and get us."

Borges whimpered slightly. "Uh, bro, maybe don’t invite death?"

Pascal, perched on Álvaro’s shoulder, flicked his tail. "Honestly? I get it. I never signed up for this life either. I was thrown in. No consent. Just… BOOM. Existence."

Álvaro nodded. "Right? Just shoved into consciousness with no tutorial, no manual, just taxes and existential dread."

Borges sighed. "You guys need more sleep."

Álvaro smirked bitterly. "Or less life."

Pascal stretched, yawning. "I mean, if the Grim Reaper is watching, he’s taking his sweet time."

A gust of wind blew through the alley.

The fire crackled, embers still glowing in the wreckage.

And in the distance…

A slow, deliberate clap.

The trio froze.

Álvaro turned sharply, pulse spiking.

From the shadows, a figure stepped forward.

Tall. Wrapped in a long gray coat, collar upturned. Face obscured by the shifting darkness.

The clapping stopped.

Then, in a smooth, deep voice, the figure said:

"Well. If you're so eager to meet death, Diderot… I might be able to arrange something."

Silence.

Borges growled low. Pascal dug his claws into Álvaro's shoulder.

Álvaro exhaled, rolling his shoulders.

"Oh, fantastic. Another mystery asshole."

He tilted his head, smirking.

"You got a name, or do I just call you 'Dramatic Cloak Guy'?"

The figure chuckled softly.

"Call me whatever you like. But I'd rather talk about you, Álvaro Diderot. And the fact that you should be dead by now."

The wind shifted. The fire crackled.

And just like that—the night got even darker.

Álvaro exhaled, shook his head, and turned back toward the car.

Borges blinked. “Uh. Are we… leaving?”

Pascal flicked his tail. “For once, a reasonable decision.”

But no. Álvaro wasn’t leaving.

He popped the trunk, rummaged around for a few seconds, and then—pulled out a chessboard.

Borges tilted his head. "Dude. Why?"

Álvaro shrugged. "I always pack one. You never know when you need to challenge Death to a game."

Pascal facepalmed. "I take it back. This is not reasonable."

The mysterious figure in the coat watched with amusement as Álvaro casually walked toward him, flipping open the board.

He found a crate—a remnant of whatever the warehouse had once stored before being incinerated—and set the board down like a medieval knight preparing for battle.

"Alright, Cloak Guy." Álvaro gestured toward the other side of the board. "You want to talk about life and death? Then we do it the right way."

The figure chuckled softly. "An Ingmar Bergman fan, I see."

Álvaro smirked. "Existential dread requires style."

The figure stepped forward, took a seat opposite him.

With a slow, deliberate motion, he moved a black pawn forward.

The game began.

Borges sat beside them, watching intently. Pascal perched on the edge of the crate, sighing deeply.

“We are actually doing this.” Pascal muttered. “We are actually playing chess with a possible assassin.”

Álvaro grinned. "Like I said—style."

The figure studied him carefully. "You don’t seem afraid, Diderot."

Álvaro moved his knight. "Oh, I am. But fear’s a game too. Play it right, you don’t lose."

The figure nodded approvingly.

The game continued.

And with every move, the air grew heavier.

Because this wasn't just a chess match.

It was a conversation.

A test.

And Álvaro knew—if he lost, it wasn't just the game that was at stake.

Pascal, watching the game unfold with growing horror, flicked his tail and muttered, "Álvaro… can you actually play chess?"

Álvaro, moving a pawn with absolute confidence, replied, "Not a clue. First time in my life."

Silence.

Pascal stared.

Then, very slowly, buried his face in his paws. "Then why would you even—"

"Queen to D4."

Both Álvaro and Pascal snapped their heads toward Borges, who was lying on his belly, watching the board like a seasoned grandmaster.

Álvaro blinked. "What?"

Borges wagged his tail. "Move your queen to D4. Checkmate in one."

Pascal lifted his head slowly, eyes wide. "Wait. You can play chess?"

Borges shrugged. "You never asked."

Álvaro, not about to question the sudden and alarming chess prowess of his own dog, picked up his queen and moved it to D4.

The mysterious figure in the coat frowned.

Then stared at the board.

Then… let out a soft chuckle.

"Well. That was unexpected."

He leaned back in his chair, nodding slowly.

"Checkmate."

Álvaro grinned. "Guess that means I win."

The man smirked. "Maybe. Or maybe it just means the game is bigger than you thought."

He stood up, adjusting his coat.

"Either way… you've bought yourself more time."

With that, he turned and walked into the shadows, disappearing into the night.

Leaving behind a chessboard, a mystery…

…and a dog who had apparently been a secret genius this entire time.

Álvaro exhaled, leaning back. "Borges. Buddy. Why didn't you ever mention you could play chess?"

Borges grinned. "You never asked."

Pascal, shaking his head, muttered, "I hate this timeline."

Álvaro, still staring at the chessboard in disbelief, ran a hand through his hair. "Borges, you genius. How can we even—"

Borges sat up proudly, tail wagging. "Pay the cheese tax."

Silence.

Pascal, squinting in absolute exhaustion, sighed. "Of course. Of course there's a price."

Álvaro rubbed his temples. "Okay, fine. How much are we talking?"

Borges grinned. "One substantial piece of cheese, payable immediately."

Álvaro groaned, already digging through the car. "We just survived a burning building, an assassin's mind game, and a cosmic-level existential crisis, and you want cheese?"

Borges nodded solemnly. "Genius doesn't come free."

Pascal flicked his tail. "I hate that he's right."

Álvaro, finally fishing out a slightly crushed piece of cheese from a gas station snack pack, held it up.

Borges immediately perked up.

Álvaro sighed. "This is what my life has become."

He handed over the cheese.

Borges snatched it happily, tail wagging, and munched away with the air of a king collecting tribute.

Pascal glared at both of them. "We just played chess with death, and this is the aftermath."

Borges licked his lips. "You're just mad because you don't get paid in cheese."

Álvaro leaned against the car, staring into the night. "So. We won a game against a possibly supernatural hitman. But we still don't know why someone wants me dead."

Borges, cheese tax successfully paid, tilted his head. "So… what's next?"

Pascal groaned. "I swear, if you say something stupid like 'follow the cheese,' I'm leaving."

Álvaro smirked. "No. We follow the next best thing."

He pulled the crumpled chessboard closer, stared at it.

And there—taped to the underside—was a tiny scrap of paper.

With an address.

Álvaro's grin widened. "Looks like we just got our next move."

Borges wagged his tail. "Cool. Can we stop for more cheese on the way?"

Pascal let out the longest, most suffering sigh of his entire life.

Álvaro was lost in thought.

The night had been absurd.

A dead man.

A car bomb.

A cryptic chess match with a shadowy figure.

A mysteriously placed address leading them toward their next clue.

And, of course, Borges' secret chess grandmaster skills, which had cost them a cheese tax.

So, as the car hummed along the empty road, Álvaro's mind drifted.

His hands stayed on the wheel, but his focus slipped.

And his foot?

It pressed a little too hard on the gas.

The numbers on the speedometer climbed.

70…

75…

80…

Borges, ears perking up, glanced at the dashboard. "Uh. Álvaro?"

85…

86…

Pascal lifted his head from the dashboard. "Dude, you're speeding."

87…

88—

And then—the car crackled.

The air fizzed with static, as if the entire world had been taped over with white noise.

The dashboard flashed wildly. The windshield warped, bending light into unnatural spirals.

Borges yelped. "WHAT DID YOU DO?!"

Pascal screeched. "WHY IS THE AIR SPARKLING?!"

Álvaro, finally snapping back to reality, gripped the wheel as the entire car lurched violently forward—

—and then everything changed.

The road beneath them wasn't a highway anymore.

The streetlights were gone. The horizon had shifted.

They weren't on an empty highway anymore.

Instead—a two-lane road stretched ahead, bordered by vintage cars, pastel-colored diners, and soda fountains straight out of a history book.

Borges blinked. "What… just… happened?"

Pascal, staring out the window, whispered, "That's a 1953 Buick."

Álvaro slowly, carefully, pulled the car to a stop.

The neon diner across the street glowed softly in the night, its sign flickering with the words: Hill Valley Café.

Borges turned to Álvaro. "Bro. Did we just Back to the Future ourselves?"

Pascal let out a slow, suffering exhale. "I hate this timeline."

Álvaro, staring blankly ahead, gripping the wheel in disbelief, muttered…

"Well. This complicates things."

As the shock of time travel settled in, Álvaro finally glanced down at the dashboard.

Because if they had just jumped to 1955, that meant one very important thing…

What the hell kind of car were they driving?

He leaned forward, scanning the interior.

Borges wagged his tail. "Okay, now I'm curious."

Pascal huffed. "I've been saying we should question this car since the beginning."

Álvaro opened the door, stepped out, and turned to look at the vehicle properly for the first time.

And there it was.

A 1956 Citroën DS, black with a deep green sheen under the neon lights. Sleek. Retro. A car that absolutely should not exist in their original timeline, let alone be in their possession.

Álvaro blinked. "We've been driving… a time machine."

Borges, gazing in awe, whispered. "Dude. This car is sexy."

Pascal groaned. "Focus. HOW did we end up with a Citroën DS? And WHY is it doing… this?"

Álvaro exhaled slowly, placing a hand on the hood. The metal still hummed slightly, like whatever had triggered their jump hadn't fully settled.

This wasn’t just a car.

Someone had given them this. Or planted it. Or left it waiting for them.

And now?

Now they were in 1955.

No ID. No plan. No clue how to get back.

Just a vintage French time-traveling car, a chess-playing dog, and an extremely annoyed cat.

Borges grinned. "So… milkshakes before we panic?"

Álvaro, still touching the humming hood, muttered.

"Yeah. Milkshakes first. Existential crisis second."

As the three of them stood staring at the Citroën DS, still humming slightly from whatever had just warped them into 1955, Pascal finally spoke up.

"Guys."

Álvaro, still in awe, ran a hand over the sleek hood. "Yeah?"

"Why," Pascal said slowly, as if talking to complete idiots, "are we only NOW paying

attention to the car we've been driving for DAYS?"

Silence.

Borges tilted his head. "Huh."

Álvaro frowned. "That's··· a great question."

Pascal sighed dramatically. "Let me summarize: we mysteriously had a car, never questioned it, drove it all over the place, survived a car bomb in it, time-traveled, and only JUST NOW realized it was a vintage Citroën DS that technically shouldn't even exist where we came from."

Álvaro opened his mouth. Paused. Closed it.

Borges wagged his tail. "Yeah, that sounds about right."

Pascal buried his face in his paws. "I hate you both so much."

Álvaro, still processing, muttered. "Okay. So. We didn't steal it. We don't know where it came from. And now it's a time machine."

Borges grinned. "That's kind of badass."

Pascal groaned. "That's kind of horrifying."

Álvaro exhaled. "Alright. Step one: milkshakes. Step two: figure out what the hell is going on with this car."

Borges wagged his tail. "Priorities. I like it."

Pascal muttered. "We are absolutely going to break the timeline before we figure this out."

And with that, they walked toward the neon-lit diner, leaving behind their mysterious time-traveling car—because at this point, really, what else could they do?

The trio crossed the street, following the warm glow of neon and the promise of greasy, nostalgic perfection.

Above the door, the diner's sign flickered cheerfully:

ARNOLD'S DRIVE-IN

Borges sniffed the air, tail wagging furiously. "Oh man, this place smells amazing. Burgers? Milkshakes? LET'S GO."

Pascal, still on Álvaro's shoulder, flicked his tail in exasperation. "You realize we're in 1955, right? Maybe try to blend in."

Álvaro pushed open the door, smirking. "Relax, Pascal. What's the worst that could happen?"
Inside Arnold's

The place was straight out of a history book—red vinyl booths, chrome-edged tables, a jukebox in the corner blasting Buddy Holly.

Teenagers in letterman jackets and poodle skirts crowded the tables, sipping milkshakes and laughing too loudly.

Álvaro, Borges, and Pascal stepped inside, immediately drawing attention.

It wasn't just the slightly strange trio.

It was Álvaro's outfit, which, while relatively unremarkable in their own time, stood out like a sore thumb in 1955.

The diner went quiet for half a second, everyone turning to stare.

Pascal hissed softly. "We're already blowing it."

Borges grinned, completely unfazed. "Don't mind us! We're just here for burgers and milkshakes!"

Álvaro nodded toward the counter. "Come on. Act normal."

Pascal muttered, "Define 'normal,' because I feel like we've never managed it once."
Ordering Like Time Travelers

At the counter, a cheerful waitress in a pink uniform smiled at them.

"Hi there! What can I get you folks?"

Álvaro glanced at the menu, trying to suppress his mild panic.

"Uh… three burgers. Three milkshakes."

Borges wagged his tail. "Make mine extra meaty!"

Pascal rolled his eyes. "And make mine nonexistent. I don’t eat processed nonsense."

The waitress blinked at Pascal, then at Borges.

Álvaro cleared his throat. "Just… make them normal."

She nodded hesitantly, scribbling on her notepad.
The Reality of 1955

While they waited, Álvaro couldn’t help but glance around.

This wasn’t just any diner. This was 1955. Everything about the world felt… lighter, simpler, less frantic.

But also…

Tense. Too clean. Too perfect. Like it was holding its breath.

Borges sniffed the air. "Something feels… weird about this place."

Pascal narrowed his eyes. "That's because it's not our place. We don't belong here, Álvaro."

Álvaro nodded. "I know. But we're here. So let's eat, regroup, and figure out what the hell comes next."

When the food arrived, Borges attacked his burger like a dog possessed.

Álvaro took a sip of his milkshake, the cold sweetness cutting through the chaos in his head.

Pascal, perched on the table, watched the door like a paranoid spy. "I don't like this. Someone's going to notice us."

And just as Pascal said it—

The door opened.

A man in a gray suit, sharp and clean, stepped inside.

He didn't look like he belonged here.

And his eyes immediately locked on Álvaro.

"Diderot."

Silence.

Borges, mid-bite, muttered through a mouthful of burger: "Well, that's not good."

Just as the man in the gray suit locked eyes with Álvaro and spoke his name, the door slammed open again.

A guy in a leather jacket strolled in, shoving the suited man casually aside with an effortless one-handed push.

He raised both thumbs, grinning.

"Heeyyyy."

The room erupted in cheers.

Borges whispered. "Holy crap. It’s him."

Pascal, ears twitching, muttered. "We just got outplayed by a local legend."

The man in the suit—who, moments ago, had been exuding pure intimidation—looked completely dumbfounded, unsure whether to be offended or just move out of the way.

Meanwhile, the leather-jacketed hero strolled straight to the jukebox.

With zero hesitation, he hit it with his fist.

The record skipped. The music changed.

A slow, dreamy song floated through the air.

Instantly, the entire mood in Arnold's shifted.

Then, with a casual snap of his fingers, he summoned every girl in the diner.

They all stood up, hypnotized.

Álvaro, Borges, and Pascal watched in stunned silence.

The leather-jacketed icon scanned the crowd, eyes cool and knowing.

Finally, he pointed at one lucky girl, took her hand, and led her to the center of the room.

The entire diner sighed dreamily.

Borges leaned toward Álvaro. "Dude… we just got overshadowed by pure, concentrated charisma."

Pascal huffed. "Unbelievable. We're in a conspiracy involving time travel and assassins, and this guy just waltzes in and resets the entire room's focus."

Álvaro, still recovering from the sheer force of 1950s cool, muttered, "Okay. But, like… how the hell do we follow that?"

Because somewhere in this bizarre, chaotic moment, the guy in the suit was still standing there—watching, waiting, and probably still dangerous.

And now, they were in a stand-off with two forces bigger than them: a time-traveling conspiracy… and the raw, untouchable energy of the Fonz.

The man in the gray suit brushed himself off, clearly not used to being ignored, and squared his shoulders.

He locked eyes with Álvaro once more, taking a step forward, his expression unreadable.

The tension in the diner thickened—this was the moment.

But before Suit Guy could even get a word out—

Fonzie, without breaking his slow dance, without missing a beat, stomped one foot on the floor.

Above them, a loose ceiling lamp trembled.

Borges, watching, tilted his head. "Wait, did he just—"

Pascal hissed. "No way that—"

The lamp came loose.

CRASH.

It dropped straight onto Suit Guy's head.

He let out a soft grunt of surprise and immediately collapsed like a ragdoll.

The diner gasped. The music played on.

Fonzie, still effortlessly dancing, winked at the trio.

Then, in one smooth motion, he mouthed the words:

"Meet me at the Cunninghams."

He then dipped his dance partner into the perfect finishing pose, while the entire diner erupted into applause.

Álvaro stared at the unconscious suit guy. Then at Fonzie. Then at Borges and Pascal.

Borges whispered. "Did… did we just get recruited by the Fonz?"

Pascal, rubbing his temples, muttered. "I am so tired of reality."

Álvaro grabbed his milkshake, took a long sip, and nodded. "Alright. Guess we're going to the Cunninghams."

Because if there was one universal rule of time travel, it was this:

When Fonzie tells you to meet him somewhere, you damn well go.

The walk to the Cunningham house was surreal. The streets were too clean, the lawns too perfect, the air too crisp—it was like stepping

into a TV show that hadn’t realized it was being watched.

When they reached the front door, Álvaro hesitated for only a moment before knocking.

The door swung open immediately.

There stood Mrs. Marion Cunningham, wearing an apron, a floral dress, and a smile so perfectly 1950s it could have been sculpted in a lab.

"Professor!" she chirped, her voice full of warmth and familiarity. "So glad you made it. We've been waiting for you."

Álvaro blinked.

Borges froze mid-tail wag.

Pascal narrowed his eyes. "…Professor?"

Mrs. Cunningham stepped aside, gesturing for them to enter.

"Come in, come in! We have so much to discuss!"

Álvaro, mind racing, exchanged a glance with Borges and Pascal.

Borges whispered. "Uh, did you sign up for a job as a professor in 1955 and forget about it?"

Pascal sighed. "Or worse. What if he already was here, and just doesn't remember?"

Álvaro, still trying to keep his face neutral, stepped inside.

Because at this point, what else could he do?

And the moment they crossed the threshold, everything got even weirder.

Álvaro stepped inside, the warmth of the Cunningham house wrapping around him like a perfectly preserved memory he wasn't sure belonged to him.

Mrs. Cunningham beamed. "Oh, Professor, it's so good to see you again. We were starting to worry you wouldn't make it."

Álvaro paused mid-step.

Borges froze. Pascal stared.

"Again?" Álvaro repeated carefully.

Mrs. Cunningham laughed lightly, waving a hand. “Oh, you and your little jokes! Of course! It’s been—well, it’s been quite some time, hasn’t it?”

Álvaro, brain short-circuiting, nodded slowly. "Sure. Quite some time."

Borges leaned in, whispering. "Okay, hold up—why does a 1950s sitcom mom know you?"

Pascal flicked his tail. "More importantly—why does she think he’s been here before?"

Mrs. Cunningham clapped her hands. "Oh, but where are my manners? You boys must be starving! Sit, sit! I'll bring out some pie!"

Before anyone could protest, she disappeared into the kitchen.

Álvaro exhaled sharply, running a hand through his hair.

Borges wagged his tail uncertainly. "So, uh… do you have any repressed memories about living in 1955?"

Pascal rolled his eyes. "Yes, Borges, that makes perfect sense. Because obviously Álvaro forgot an entire life in a time period that predates his own birth."

Álvaro, still processing, muttered, "Let's not rule anything out just yet."

Borges blinked. "Wait. Are we in a time loop? Or, like, an alternate timeline? Or—"

Before anyone could speculate further, footsteps echoed from the hallway.

And then—Fonzie walked in.

Still effortlessly cool, still grinning like he knew all the answers.

He leaned against the doorway, arms crossed.

"Alright, Professor. Let's talk about why you're back."

Silence.

Borges whispered. "We are so far past reality at this point."

Fonzie watched Álvaro carefully, expression unreadable. "You have no memory of having been here before, right?"

Álvaro, still trying to keep up with the absurdity of the last 24 hours, shook his head. "Not even a little."

Fonzie nodded. "Yeah. Figured. Well, he might explain."

And then—before anyone could ask who “he” was—

In strode a man in a lab coat, white hair slightly disheveled, eyes gleaming with the kind of intelligence that bordered on madness.

Dr. Emmett Brown.

Borges' jaw literally dropped. Pascal stopped breathing.

Doc Brown pointed at Álvaro with absolute authority.

"Because you are not thinking fourth dimensionally!"

Álvaro, staring, brain fully breaking at this point, managed to choke out, "I've been here before?"

Doc Brown grinned wildly. "Not yet!"

Silence.

Borges turned to Álvaro. "Dude. DUUUDE."

Pascal exhaled sharply. "I swear, if this turns into a bootstrap paradox, I am walking into traffic."

Álvaro, pinching the bridge of his nose, muttered, "Okay. Okay. Let's just take this from the top."

He looked at Doc Brown.

"So. I haven't been here before… but I will have been here before?"

Doc Brown grinned, adjusting his lab coat. "Exactly! To us, this is the first time! To you, it is… well, complicated!"

Fonzie nodded approvingly. "See? Guy gets it."

Álvaro groaned. "I do not get it."

Borges, still vibrating from excitement, whispered. "This is officially the best thing that has ever happened."

Pascal hissed. "We are going to break the timeline. I just know it."

And as Doc Brown pulled out a stack of blueprints, gesturing wildly, Álvaro realized something:

This night was nowhere near over.

Álvaro, Borges, and Pascal sat there, absorbing the absolute insanity of what was being explained to them.

Doc Brown, gesturing wildly, continued, “See? We know you because you’ve already been here—according to our timeline! But to you, that hasn’t happened yet!”

Álvaro rubbed his temples. "Right. So… our before is actually your after."

Fonzie, nodding sagely, "Exactly."

Borges, ears twitching, tried to keep up. "So… that means we will have already been here, except we haven't, but we will?"

Pascal groaned. "I hate everything about that sentence."

Doc Brown clapped his hands. “And that’s why we have to stop you—before you come here before!”

Álvaro blinked. "I'm sorry. What?"

Fonzie, still casually leaning on the counter, smirked. "Yeah, man. Turns out, you being here? Bad news. Real bad. We gotta stop it before it happens."

Pascal, deadpan, "So you’re saying we need to stop us before we come here... while we are already here?"

Doc Brown grinned, eyes gleaming. "NOW you're thinking fourth-dimensionally!"

Borges wagged his tail excitedly. "Okay, but why do we have to stop ourselves?"

The room went silent.

Fonzie exchanged a look with Doc Brown.

Mrs. Cunningham, who had been listening quietly from the kitchen doorway, looked worried.

Álvaro, suddenly much more serious, leaned forward. "What happens if I don’t stop myself?"

Doc Brown adjusted his coat, took a deep breath, and said—

“Then you destroy the entire timeline.”

Silence.

Borges blinked. "Like… the whole thing?"

Fonzie nodded. "Yep. All of it. Poof. Gone."

Pascal, horrified, muttered, "Oh, fantastic. We finally get a straight answer, and it's apocalypse-level bad."

Álvaro sighed deeply, closing his eyes for a moment. Then he muttered,

“Of course. Because why wouldn’t this be my fault? So, what do I do in my future, your past?”

“You...” – dramatic pause – “ you clone Fonzie's cool.

"I ⋯ what, now? Clone?"

Doc Brown nodded solemnly. "Precisely."

Borges wagged his tail. "Wait, so he doesn’t steal it?"

Fonzie, raising both thumbs, smirked. "Heeeeyyyy."

Doc Brown held up both hands defensively. "No, no, Fonzie, easy. No one's taking your cool. That would be impossible! That cannot be universally done, much like traveling faster than light—it is a fundamental constant of the universe!"

Fonzie nodded approvingly. "Glad we cleared that up."

Pascal blinked slowly. "I cannot believe we are seriously discussing this."

Álvaro, still struggling to process the sheer weight of this revelation, exhaled. "Okay, so I don't steal Fonzie's cool. I clone it?"

Doc Brown nodded vigorously. "YES! You isolate the essence of pure, unfiltered cool, duplicate it through—well, the process is a bit unclear—but what matters is that you succeed!"

Álvaro blinked. "And then I bring it back to my time?"

Doc Brown, Fonzie, and Mrs. Cunningham exchanged glances.

Finally, Mrs. Cunningham, smiling kindly but looking deeply concerned, said:

"We were… hoping you'd tell us that."

Silence.

Borges slowly turned to Álvaro. "Dude. What are you planning?"

Pascal buried his face in his paws. "Whatever it is, we have to stop it immediately."

Álvaro rubbed his temples. "I don't even know what I did yet!"

Fonzie grinned, tilting his head. "Hey, man. You're the professor. You tell us."

Doc Brown clasped his hands together. "All we know is that it worked—but something went wrong. Terribly, universally wrong."

Pascal groaned. "Oh, great. What could possibly go wrong with playing god with the essence of cool?"

Álvaro, exhaling sharply, muttered, "Guess we're about to find out."

Álvaro rubbed his temples, eyes darting between Doc Brown, Fonzie, and Mrs. Cunningham.

"So… what now?"

Doc Brown straightened his coat, adjusting his goggles with a manic gleam in his eye. "Now? Now we must distill the essence of the anti-cool!"

Silence.

Borges blinked. "The… what?"

Pascal, already regretting hearing those words, muttered. "Oh no. No, no, no, no, no."

Doc Brown grinned wildly. "If we are to neutralize the dangerously cloned cool, we need its exact opposite! Something so utterly, profoundly uncool that it can counteract the sheer force of the cool anomaly!"

Álvaro sighed, rubbing his forehead. "And then I go back to my time and make the two··· react?"

Doc Brown nodded furiously. "EXACTLY! You mix pure cool with pure anti-cool—and BOOM! The paradox resolves itself!"

Álvaro frowned. "Define boom."

Doc Brown paused.

Then cleared his throat.

"Well. You might want to wear some goggles. And stay a few hundred miles away."

Silence.

Borges whispered. "We are literally about to create a fashion-based nuclear event."

Pascal buried his face in his paws. "This is how we die. I just know it."

Álvaro, arms crossed, sighed deeply. "Okay. Let's assume I actually go along with this. What, exactly, counts as the essence of anti-cool?"

Doc Brown grinned. "Ah! A very important question!"

Fonzie, still leaning against the counter, finally chimed in. "I got a pretty good idea where to start."

Álvaro raised an eyebrow. "Oh?"

Fonzie nodded sagely.

Then he smirked.

"We gotta find the nerdiest, most fashion-disastrous, socially oblivious dude in all of 1955."

Borges snorted. "Oh my God. We're hunting the ultimate dork."

Pascal groaned. "This timeline deserves to collapse."

Doc Brown clapped his hands. "Gentlemen! We are about to embark on the most scientifically crucial quest of our lives!"

Álvaro sighed. "I can't believe I'm about to say this, but…"

He turned to Fonzie.

"Where do we find the biggest nerd in 1955?"

Fonzie grinned wider.

"Easy"

The front door burst open.

And in strode Ralph Malph.

A freckled, red-haired tornado of unchecked dweeb energy.

Dressed in pants just a little too high, a sweater vest that screamed 'mother dressed me', and shoes that had never been scuffed by an act of rebellion.

He had the energy of a man who thought he was charming but had never successfully flirted.

And he walked in like he owned the place.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" Ralph Malph threw his arms out dramatically. "Your savior has arrived!"

Fonzie, without missing a beat, turned to Álvaro.

"There. That's your guy."

Borges, ears pinned back, whispered. "Oh… oh my God. It's him."

Pascal hissed softly. "That… is the anti-cool."

Álvaro stared. "I mean… yeah. That tracks."

Ralph Malph grinned, strutting forward like a man who had never once questioned his own charisma. "Alright, Fonz, you said you needed my expertise. Lay it on me! Am I finally getting that ladies' man training? 'Cause let me tell ya, the dames are not picking up what I'm putting down."

Fonzie clapped a hand on Ralph's shoulder, nodding sagely. "Ralphie, my man, today… you're more important than you ever imagined."

Ralph beamed. "I knew it!"

Doc Brown gestured wildly toward Álvaro. "THIS is the professor! He is a man of great importance from the future! And you, Ralph Malph, are about to save the entire timeline!"

Ralph's smile flickered slightly. "Oh… wow, uh… Okay, that's a little bigger than what I was expecting, but hey! No pressure, right?"

Pascal muttered. "I would like to state for the record that this is the stupidest plan in history."

Borges wagged his tail. "And yet, I love it."

Álvaro pinched the bridge of his nose. "Okay. Someone explain to Ralph what, exactly, we need him for."

Fonzie grinned. "Ralphie, buddy, you're the purest form of anti-cool we could find."

Ralph blinked. "…Excuse me?"

Doc Brown interrupted. "We need to extract the essence of anti-cool, the very opposite of my dear friend Fonzie's untouchable aura, in order to neutralize a catastrophic event in the future!"

Ralph paused.

Then squinted.

Then turned back to Fonzie.

"So wait… you guys are saying I'm the exact opposite of you?"

Fonzie nodded. "Yep."

Ralph frowned. "And that's… a good thing?"

Doc Brown clapped his hands. "Ralph Malph, my boy, it is the most important thing in the universe right now!"

Ralph processed this.

Then straightened his sweater vest.

"Well… alright then. What do I gotta do?"

Álvaro, exhaling, muttered. "Yeah, I'd like to know that too."

Doc Brown grinned.

"Gentlemen… we're going to extract, contain, and weaponize pure, unfiltered nerd energy!"

Ralph gasped. "OH! I am good at that!"

Borges wagged his tail. "This is my favorite timeline."

Pascal groaned. "This is my villain origin story."

Doc Brown produced a strange device—a box with a lightbulb on top and a wrist strap dangling from its side.

He held it up triumphantly. "This, my friends, is what you used to clone Fonzie's cool in the future!"

Everyone in the room, except for Doc Brown and Fonzie, looked deeply skeptical.

Álvaro narrowed his eyes. “This looks like something you cobbled together from a junk drawer.”

Pascal, tail flicking, muttered, “I’m not putting that anywhere near me.”

Borges tilted his head. “Does it… work?”

Doc Brown, grinning wildly, turned to Fonzie. “Well, there’s only one way to find out!”

Fonzie, without missing a beat, stepped forward. “Strap me in, Doc.”

The room went silent.

Doc Brown carefully wrapped the wristband around Fonzie's arm, securing it with a loud Velcro tear.

"Fonzie," Doc Brown said, voice suddenly very serious, "would you work a very small amount of your cool, please? Just enough to get a reading."

Fonzie nodded, cool as ever, and turned his attention to Pascal.

"Hey there, kitty."

The room froze.

Pascal, normally the grumpiest, most aloof creature in any timeline, let out a small, startled squeak.

Then— to everyone's shock—he transformed.

Gone was the cranky cat.

In his place was a teenage high school starlet, complete with glossy fur, a perfectly curled tail, and the kind of blushing, giggly energy that belonged in a 1950s rom-com.

"Oh my gosh!" Pascal giggled, covering his face with his paws. "Stop! You're so cool!"

The room exploded in light.

The bulb on Doc Brown's device glowed so brightly it lit the entire block, casting shadows clear across the neighborhood.

Ralph Malph shielded his eyes. “HOLY—WHAT IS HAPPENING?!”

Borges, tail wagging, barked. “IT WORKS! IT TOTALLY WORKS!”

Álvaro, still blinking away the afterimage, muttered, “What the hell just happened to Pascal?”

Fonzie smirked, winking at the transformed cat. “Told ya. The cool don’t miss.”

Pascal, still in full starlet mode, whispered dreamily, “He’s perfect.”

Doc Brown, scribbling furiously on a notepad, laughed wildly. “IT WORKS! IT WORKS! FONZIE, YOUR COOL IS QUANTIFIABLE!”

The room settled, the light bulb dimming, and Pascal slowly returned to his usual form—though he refused to make eye contact with anyone.

Borges snorted. “You were totally fangirling.”

Pascal hissed. “Say another word, and I will end you.”

Álvaro, rubbing his temples, sighed. “Alright. So we’ve confirmed that Fonzie’s cool can light up a city block and turn Pascal into a lovestruck maniac. What’s next?”

Doc Brown, eyes gleaming, grinned. “Now, we distill the anti-cool. And then… we neutralize the anomaly!”

The room went silent again.

Ralph Malph gulped. “Uh… I don’t have to flirt with Pascal, do I?”

Pascal groaned loudly. “Please. Just kill me now.”

With the device still buzzing from Fonzie’s display, Doc Brown quickly unstrapped the wristband from Fonzie’s arm and turned to Ralph Malph.

"Alright, Ralph, your turn."

Ralph, nervously adjusting his sweater vest, blinked. "Uh… I don’t know if I like where this is going."

Doc Brown didn’t wait. He wrapped the wristband around Ralph’s wrist and fastened it tight.

Borges whispered. "Oh, this is gonna be bad."

Pascal, ears pinned back, flicked his tail impatiently. "You’re all going to regret this."

Doc Brown, adjusting his glasses, gestured dramatically. "Ralph, would you mind catcalling the cat?"

Ralph swallowed hard. "Uh… sure, I guess?"

He cleared his throat, tried to put on his best ‘suave’ voice, and said:

"Hey, you little kitty"

Instant regret.

Pascal's entire body went stiff. His pupils contracted into slits. His fur bristled like an electrocuted porcupine.

Then—with a razor-sharp snarl, he launched himself straight at Ralph's jugular.

"DIE, YOU INSULT TO EXISTENCE!"

Ralph let out an unholy screech, flailing backward. "OH GOD, HE'S GONNA KILL ME—!"

Doc Brown, moving with surprising speed, caught Pascal mid-air—just before death was delivered.

And then—the device on Ralph's wrist sputtered.

The lightbulb on top flickered once.

Then went completely dark.

And then—collapsed in on itself with a tiny implosion.

The room went silent.

Doc Brown carefully put Pascal back down, who immediately started grooming himself like he hadn't just attempted murder.

Doc dusted off his coat, then turned to the group.

"See?"

Borges, eyes wide, whispered. "That was the scariest thing I've ever seen."

Ralph was still pressed against the wall, panting in terror. "THAT CAT JUST TRIED TO END ME."

Pascal, casually licking a paw, muttered. "I stand by my actions."

Álvaro, massaging his temples, muttered. "So what you're saying is… we now have a way to neutralize the cool anomaly."

Doc Brown nodded proudly. "Exactly! Fonzie's cool illuminates a city block! Ralph's anti-cool implodes reality! The two forces are so diametrically opposed that when we bring them together…"

He grinned manically. "They will cancel each other out."

Silence.

Borges blinked. "Wait. And what happens to Álvaro when he's standing near this?"

Doc Brown clapped a reassuring hand on Álvaro's shoulder.

"Oh, I wouldn't worry about that. You'll just want to be a few hundred miles away. Wearing goggles."

Pascal, deadpan, sighed. "Great. Another explosion. Fantastic."

Álvaro exhaled slowly. "Okay. So now we go back to my time and trigger… whatever the hell this is."

Fonzie gave him a thumbs-up. "Heyyy, don't worry, Professor. If anyone can handle it, it's you."

Álvaro sighed deeply. "Oh yeah. I feel so reassured."

Borges wagged his tail. "I dunno, man. I think this is the best plan we've ever had."

Pascal hissed. "I hate you all."

Doc Brown grabbed a blueprint, rolled it out onto the table, and grinned.

"Alright, gentlemen… let's send you back to the future!"

Pascal stared at the blueprint Doc Brown had just rolled out.

A clock tower.

A thunderstorm.

And an absolutely unhinged plan to send them back to the future using a lightning strike.

"A CLOCK TOWER?" Pascal's tail bristled. "DURING A LIGHTNING STORM? Have you smoked something and didn't pass it on?"

Doc Brown, completely unfazed, tapped the blueprint. "1.21 gigawatts, my feline friend. How else would you get that kind of energy in 1955?"

Pascal hissed in disbelief. "Should I be thinking fourth-dimensionally right now?"

Doc Brown wagged a finger. "No, for this, you should have just paid attention to physics in high school!"

Borges snorted. "Oh, he's never letting that one go."

Álvaro, leaning in, studied the plan. "Okay. Walk me through this. We drive the Citroën DS toward the clock tower at precisely the right moment?"

Doc Brown nodded, eyes gleaming. "Correct! At exactly 10:04 PM, the lightning will strike the tower, traveling down the conductor I will attach, and into the Citroën's energy intake—supercharging the system for the time jump!"

Pascal rubbed his face. "I hate this plan."

Ralph Malph, still recovering from nearly being murdered by Pascal, muttered, "And what happens if you miss the timing?"

Doc Brown waved a dismissive hand. "Then they're stuck in 1955 forever!"

Silence.

Álvaro sighed deeply. "No pressure, then."

Borges wagged his tail. "I dunno, man. We've done dumber things."

Pascal groaned. "I'm surrounded by idiots. Actual idiots."

Doc Brown clapped his hands together. "Alright! No time to waste! We have less than 24 hours before the storm! We need to rig the tower, prep the car, and—most importantly—"

He pointed dramatically at Ralph Malph.

"We need to extract and contain pure anti-cool!"

Ralph gulped. "Yeah, still not sure I like that."

Fonzie, cool as ever, patted his shoulder. "Heyyy, don't worry, Ralphie. You're about to be the most important nerd in history."

Borges grinned. "This is actually happening, huh?"

Álvaro exhaled, rubbing his temples. "God help us."

Pascal just muttered. "This timeline deserves to burn."

Álvaro, trying to cling to some semblance of politeness amid the absolute insanity of their situation, turned to Mrs. Cunningham with a sheepish smile.

"Mrs. C— Oh, I mean, Mrs. Cunningham, ma'am, awfully sorry."

Mrs. Cunningham beamed at him, that warm 1950s smile never faltering. "Oh, you can call me whatever you please, dear professor!"

Álvaro nodded. "May I trouble you for some coffee?"

Before Mrs. Cunningham could respond, Pascal flicked his tail and muttered, "Edibles time, I figure."

Álvaro sighed, rubbing his temples. "Yep."

Mrs. Cunningham clapped her hands happily. "Oh, coffee! Of course! I'll brew a fresh pot"

Álvaro, already reaching into his pocket for the emergency stash of edibles, muttered, "If we're about to attempt clock tower lightning-based time travel using theoretical anti-cool energy, I refuse to do it sober."

Pascal, watching as Mrs. Cunningham happily bustled into the kitchen, whispered, "You realize we're about to get high in a 1950s sitcom house while plotting the nerdiest sci-fi disaster ever conceived?"

Borges grinned. "Living the dream, man."

Álvaro popped an edible into his mouth and sighed.

"Let's just hope we don't accidentally break time before we even get to the car."

Just as Mrs. Cunningham poured the coffee, the front door swung open again.

A new presence filled the room—bold, confident, and carrying the kind of energy that turned heads the moment she entered.

Pinky Tuscadero.

Dressed in her signature pink leather jacket, hands on her hips, she took a few steps inside before flashing Mrs. C a bright smile.

"Oh, hello, Mrs. C."

Mrs. Cunningham beamed. "Oh, hello, darling! Do have some coffee and cookies."

But Pinky wasn't here for coffee or cookies.

Her smile dropped.

She turned, locking eyes on Álvaro like a heat-seeking missile.

Then, in one fluid motion, she put her hands on her hips and frowned.

"Well, well, well. Look who's here. Very nice of you never calling back, Mister Professor."

Silence.

Borges blinked. "Wait. What?"

Pascal, staring at Álvaro with utter disbelief, muttered, "YOU KNOW HER?!"

Álvaro, mouth opening and closing like a fish trying to form a coherent thought, finally managed to croak out—

"I… uh… what?"

Pinky crossed her arms, tapping her foot. "Don't what me. You know exactly what I'm talking about."

Álvaro absolutely did not know what she was talking about.

Doc Brown, watching all of this unfold, whispered excitedly. "Ohhh, this is fascinating. A paradox unfolding in real-time!"

Fonzie smirked, leaning against the counter. "Oof. Hate to say it, Professor, but looks like you left a lady hangin'."

Borges snorted. "I knew he had a past. Or, I guess, a future past?"

Pascal facepalmed. "Oh my God. What did you do?"

Álvaro, running a hand through his hair, sighed.

"I… genuinely have no idea what's happening right now."

Pinky narrowed her eyes. "Oh, really? You just mysteriously forgot about our night at Inspiration Point?"

Álvaro blinked rapidly.

"We… went to Inspiration Point?"

Pinky took a slow step closer. "Oh, honey. We did a lot more than that."

Borges choked on his coffee.

Pascal let out the longest, most suffering groan of his life.

Álvaro, staring at Pinky like she had just announced he was the King of England, whispered—

"I really need that coffee now."

Pinky was still standing there, arms crossed, glaring at Álvaro like a woman scorned—except Álvaro had absolutely no memory of ever meeting her before.

She turned to Fonzie, tilting her head. "Hey, Fonz, did he take this never calling back thing from you?"

Fonzie, annoyed, squinted at her.

"Heyyyyyyy."

Pinky immediately backtracked, hands up. "Oh no, Fonz, I didn't mean it that way."

Fonzie, benign and all-forgiving, gave a more relaxed nod.

"Heyyyyyyy."

Borges, sensing an opportunity amid the chaos, seized the cookie tray from the table and began eating like a king.

Álvaro, who had already taken one edible, decided that was not enough to handle the sheer absurdity of this moment.

He reached into his pocket, popped another with the desperation of a man who needed his mind to be as unstable as reality currently was.

Pascal, still lightly infatuated from Fonzie's earlier cool-infused compliment, flicked his tail and—without thinking—winked at him.

Fonzie, noticing, gave a smooth, knowing nod.

"Heyyyyyyy."

Pascal immediately turned away, mortified, tail puffing up like an embarrassed teenager.

Borges, munching on cookies, watched this unfold and snorted. "Dude. You're still blushing."

Pascal, hissing, buried his face in his paws. "Kill me."

Meanwhile, Pinky was still waiting for Álvaro to explain himself.

Álvaro, edibles hitting at the perfect moment, leaned back in his chair and sighed dramatically.

"Okay. So let me get this straight. I—who just arrived in 1955 today—apparently have already been here before, took you to the Inspiration Point, had a night so unforgettable that I forgot it, and never called you back?"

Pinky narrowed her eyes. "That about sums it up, yeah."

Álvaro, now fully embracing the insanity, rubbed his face. "Okay. Yeah. That tracks."

Pascal groaned into his paws. "I hate time travel."

Borges nodded, dunking a cookie into Álvaro's coffee. "I love time travel."

Fonzie, grinning, leaned against the counter. "So, Professor, what's the plan? 'Cause I gotta say, getting on Pinky's bad side? Not a good move."

Álvaro, high, overwhelmed, and somehow involved in a time paradox romance, exhaled sharply.

"We are about to drive a French car into a lightning storm to neutralize an existential paradox using pure distilled nerd energy. Can we just… deal with one disaster at a time?"

Pinky tilted her head. "…Is that some kind of metaphor?"

Pascal groaned. "I wish it was."

THAT NIGHT

The Citroën DS sat in the middle of Town Hall Square, its sleek black-green body gleaming under the streetlights.

A long cable stretched from the engine to the lightning rod atop the Town Hall clock tower, humming with potential energy.

Doc Brown stood high above them, pacing near the clock's massive gears, shouting last-minute calculations.

Fonzie, watching from the sidewalk with Pinky and Mrs. Cunningham, gave a final thumbs-up. “Heyyyyyy! Good luck, Professor!”

Álvaro, Borges, and Pascal sat inside the car, watching the storm gather overhead.

The air crackled. The moment was near.

And then—Álvaro, deep in thought, suddenly spoke.

"Guys... Guys….”

“What?”

“Unless you are a rapist, what comes before sex?"

Silence.

Borges blinked. "Uh… foreplay?"

Álvaro nodded. "Right. And how do you get to foreplay?"

Pascal, still on edge, flicked his tail. "Well… you court the girl, fascinate her…"

Álvaro pointed at him. "Exactly. And what are you being while doing that?"

Borges and Pascal exchanged glances.

Then, at the same time—"…Cool?"

Álvaro grinned.

"YES. Cool! You need cool! And what is foreplay if not an introduction?"

Borges' ears perked up. "Wait… you mean…"

Álvaro slammed his hands on the steering wheel, triumphant.

"YES, GUYS, YES! PROLEGOMENA!"

Pascal's eyes widened. "So… 'cool' is Prolegomena?"

Before Álvaro could confirm—

The clock struck 10:04 PM.

A deafening crack of thunder split the sky.

The lightning struck the tower, surging down the cable.

For a moment—time seemed to stop.

Then—a blinding explosion of energy engulfed the Citroën DS, the force wrapping them in a storm of Kant's writings—pages flying, words dissolving into pure metaphysical energy.

And then—

They were gone.

Vanished from 1955 in a flash of cool-infused Prolegomena.

As the smoke cleared, Doc Brown wiped his forehead. "Great Scott!"

Fonzie, nodding approvingly, smirked. "Told ya cool was timeless."

Mrs. Cunningham sighed. "I hope they make it back okay."

Pinky crossed her arms. "He better come back. He still owes me a date."

And with that, the past was left behind.

Because somewhere—or somewhen—Álvaro, Borges, and Pascal had just crash-landed back into their own time…

And now they had to figure out if they had actually fixed anything.

The Citroën DS screeched to a halt, tires smoking, leaving two perfect fire tracks on the asphalt.

They were back.

Back in their own time, back in a world that hopefully hadn't collapsed from a paradoxical Fonzie-cloning disaster.

Álvaro gripped the wheel tightly, heart pounding, brain still catching up with the sheer metaphysical absurdity they had just endured.

"So that's how… somehow… I had that apparent affair with Pinky Tuscadero."

He exhaled, staring blankly ahead.

"I used the cool."

Silence.

Pascal, still curled up in the passenger seat, flicked his tail and muttered, "Come on, man. You'd never do that."

Álvaro blinked. "What?"

Pascal sat up, looking at him seriously. "Either you attempted with your own—sorry—your deficient cool…"

Borges snorted. "Harsh."

Pascal continued. "…or you'd fail. But you'd never trick a girl into liking you. That's not who you are."

Borges nodded in agreement. "Yeah, confirm, man. That's not your style."

Álvaro swallowed hard.

"So… that me, in my future and in 1955's past… was not me."

Silence.

Borges tilted his head. "Then who the hell was it?"

Pascal narrowed his eyes.

"Or worse… who did we just send back into time?"

Álvaro stared at the still-smoking tire marks, realization settling in like a lead weight.

The car had returned.

But had they actually fixed anything?

Or had they just set something much worse in motion?

The fire streaks on the asphalt had barely begun to cool when she appeared again.

The dwarf woman with the orange and pink hair.

She flashed them. Again.

Borges yelped. "AGAIN?!"

Pascal, squinting, muttered. "At this point, I'm more disturbed if she doesn't do it."

Then—she smirked, hands on her hips, and muttered—

"Duck, you suckers."

And just like that—she disappeared into the night.

One second later—

FWOOOOSH!

An RPG came screaming from the darkness, slicing straight through the cabin of the Citroën.

It missed everyone by a hair.

Álvaro felt the wind of the projectile's wake sear past his cheek.

Borges flattened himself against the dashboard.

Pascal shrieked and launched into the air, claws out.

Then—the explosion.

The rocket impacted the ground just ahead of them.

BOOM.

The shockwave hit like a train, flipping the Citroën into the air.

Spinning. Tumbling.

Everything was chaos.

The world turned upside down.

The car did a full backflip, windshield shattering, doors twisting, gravity ceasing to exist for a breathless moment—

Then—they crashed back down.

HARD.

Metal groaned. Tires popped. Smoke billowed from the engine.

And then—silence.

Except for the ringing in their ears.

Álvaro was the first to move, groaning as he unbuckled his seatbelt and slumped forward.

Borges was upside down, legs in the air, blinking rapidly. "…We lived?"

Pascal, fur bristled like a terrified hedgehog, wheezed. "I'm going to kill someone. I don't know who, but someone is dying for this."

Álvaro, coughing out smoke, kicked the door open. "Who the hell RPGs a time traveler?!"

Borges shook himself off, scrambling out after him. "Dude, more importantly—WHO EVEN HAS AN RPG READY LIKE THAT?!"

Pascal, hissing, jumped onto the wrecked hood. "Oh, I don't know. Maybe the same people trying to erase you from history?"

Álvaro ran a hand through his hair, exhaling shakily. "Okay. We survived. The car, not so much."

The Citroën DS was totaled.

Smoke poured from the wreckage. The windshield was gone. Half the roof had crumpled.

Borges sighed. "Rest in peace, sexy French time machine."

Pascal scanned the shadows, fur still raised. "Whoever shot that is still out there."

Álvaro nodded grimly.

"Then we find them. And we find out what the hell they're so afraid of."

Because someone had just tried to erase them—permanently.

And if they were that desperate…

It meant Álvaro was dangerously close to something they didn't want him to know.

Álvaro, still catching his breath, reached instinctively for his coat pocket.

His fingers brushed against something cold.

A test tube.

He pulled it out, holding it up to the dim light of the flickering street lamps.

The liquid inside was dark and sluggish, swirling ominously like it knew it shouldn't exist.

The essence of anti-cool.

Doc Brown must have slipped it into his pocket before they left.

Álvaro stared at it, realization creeping up his spine.

This was the key.

This was how he fixed what he had started.

But…

"Where do I find the cool?" he muttered.

Borges, ears still flattened from the explosion, raised an eyebrow. "Well, Fonzie's in 1955, so that's a problem."

Pascal, fur still on edge, sighed. "Great. We lost our infinite cool battery."

Álvaro's mind raced.

The plan was simple: mix cool and anti-cool, create a controlled paradox, and reset whatever disaster his past/future self had unleashed.

But to do that, he needed pure cool.

And if Fonzie was off the table…

That only left one other option.

A name slipped from his lips before he could stop it.

"…Bonaventure."

Silence.

Borges stared. "Uh. You wanna run that by us again?"

Pascal groaned. "Oh, fantastic. Let's go bargain with the most dangerous man we know."

Álvaro turned, shoving the test tube back into his pocket.

"He's my only shot."

Bonaventure was the definition of control. Precision. Charisma. An enigmatic fixer who operated in the shadows but always—always—had the upper hand.

If anyone in this time had an untouchable aura of cool, it was him.

The problem?

Bonaventure didn’t work for free.

And he never—ever—played a game unless he already knew he was going to win.

Borges sighed, stepping over the smoldering wreckage of their time-traveling Citroën. "Alright, genius. How do we even find him?"

Álvaro looked at the burning car, then at the test tube in his pocket.

Then, with a slow grin, he muttered—

"We make him find us."

Álvaro rubbed his temples, considering his options.

There were multiple ways to get Bonaventure's attention.

But none was worse than this one.

So, obviously, it was the one they were going with.

Step One: Acquire a Loudspeaker Car

Borges, tail wagging nervously, muttered, "I can't believe we're actually doing this."

Pascal, perched on Álvaro's shoulder, sighed. "We have reached a level of reckless stupidity previously thought impossible."

Álvaro ignored them as he walked into a sketchy rental lot, straight up to a guy who looked like he barely cared if you returned the car in one piece.

"I need a vehicle with loudspeakers. The kind they use to announce the circus is in town."

The rental guy squinted. "For what?"

Álvaro grinned. "I am the circus."

The guy shrugged. "Fifty bucks extra."

Step Two: Be Absolutely Insufferable

The car was old, ugly, and equipped with two massive loudspeakers bolted onto the roof.

Perfect.

Álvaro climbed into the driver's seat, turned to his crew, and smirked. "Gentlemen. Let's make some enemies."

Borges flattened his ears. "I already regret this."

Pascal curled his tail around himself. "We are going to die. Just putting that out there."

Álvaro slammed his hand on the microphone switch.

A sharp burst of feedback rang through the city streets, making half the pedestrians jump.

Then, he took a deep breath and yelled into the mic—

"BONAVENTURE! SHOW YOUR FACE IF YOU HAVE SOME BALLS!"

The sound blasted across the streets, bouncing off buildings, echoing down alleys, rattling windows.

People stopped in their tracks, staring up at the ridiculous, loudspeaker-equipped vehicle crawling through the city.

Some laughed.

Some looked terrified.

And somewhere—without a doubt—Bonaventure heard it.

Borges covered his face with his paws. "I can feel death approaching."

Pascal exhaled sharply. "If I survive this, I am leaving you forever."

Álvaro, grinning like a lunatic, hit the mic again.

"WHAT'S WRONG, BONAVENTURE? DID YOU LOSE YOUR EDGE? DID YOU LOSE YOUR COOL?"

That did it.

Because wherever Bonaventure was, whatever he was doing…

Álvaro had just made sure he was on his way.

And when he arrived, he was going to be pissed.

With zero hesitation and an impressive lack of self-preservation, Álvaro, Borges, and Pascal doubled down on the worst plan ever conceived.

They popped more edibles, because clearly, the only way to match the insanity of their situation was to fully embrace it.

Then, with the rented loudspeaker car blaring across the city, they set off to do the dumbest thing imaginable: taunt Bonaventure until he physically manifested out of sheer rage.
The Route of Stupidity

Downtown:

"BONAVENTURE, YOU GHOST OF A MAN, COME OUT AND FACE ME LIKE YOU HAVE A SPINE!"

Residential District:

"EVEN THE PIGEONS THINK YOU'VE GOTTEN SOFT!"

Financial District:

"HEY, MAYBE HE CAN'T HEAR US OVER THE SOUND OF HIS MONEY BEING POINTLESS!"

Church District:

(A pause as Pascal realizes where they are.)

"…Even God doesn't know where you are."

Park Avenue:

Borges, into the mic: "YOU CAN'T HIDE FOREVER, BONAVENTURE! EVEN MY DOG NOSE CAN SMELL YOUR COWARDICE!"

Pedestrians gathered at every stop, watching this ridiculous spectacle unfold.

Some people laughed.
Some whispered in horror.
Some immediately started taking bets on how long it would take before they died.

The Edibles Kick In

Álvaro slowed the car down just a little, eyes glazed as the edibles started taking hold.

"Guys… what if Bonaventure is, like, a concept and not a person?"

Borges, snacking on a bag of stolen cookies, squinted. "Like… a manifestation of something?"

Pascal, sprawled out on the dashboard, eyes half-lidded, murmured. "You mean like Death? Or Taxes? Or, I dunno… the inevitable collapse of civilization?"

Álvaro nodded sagely. "Exactly."

They sat in silence for a moment, pondering the philosophical implications of Bonaventure as a cosmic inevitability.

Then, Borges tapped the mic again and yelled—

"BONAVENTURE, IF YOU'RE A GOD, PROVE IT!"

Pascal groaned. "Oh, for fu—"

The next time they turned a corner…

They slammed on the brakes.

Because blocking the road ahead…

Was a row of black SUVs.

Doors opened.

Men in dark suits stepped out, calm, composed, terrifyingly efficient.

One of them tilted his head, listening to something in his earpiece.

Then, from the center SUV, a single figure stepped out.

Black coat. Sharp features. Cold, unreadable eyes.

Bonaventure.

He adjusted his cuffs, took one slow step forward, and looked directly at them.

Then, in a voice like polished steel, he said—

"Turn off the loudspeakers."

Silence.

Borges swallowed audibly. "I have never sobered up faster in my life."

Pascal, still high as hell, whispered. "I think I just met God."

Álvaro, gripping the steering wheel, exhaled deeply.

Then, in the stupidest move possible, he picked up the mic one last time.

"Took you long enough."

Bonaventure smiled.

Not a friendly smile.

A smile that said he was going to enjoy this.

Then the SUVs moved.

The SUV engines growled like wolves, men in suits moving with calculated precision, but Álvaro wasn't running.

Neither were Borges or Pascal.

Because this wasn't a chase.

This was a collision course.

Álvaro slammed his foot on the gas pedal, the loudspeaker car roaring forward toward the SUVs.

Borges, clutching the dashboard, yelled, "WHAT IS THE PLAN, MAN?"

Álvaro grinned, eyes locked on Bonaventure.

"Simple. We make them blink first."

Pascal, perched on the back of the seat, tail flicking wildly, hissed. "You're high as hell, and this plan is even worse than the last one!"

Borges, shaking his head, muttered, "Damn it. Let's do it."

The car accelerated, rattling as it barreled toward the line of SUVs.

The men in suits stepped back, unsure whether to fire or move.

Bonaventure, calm as ever, stood in the center of the street.

He didn't flinch.

He didn't blink.

He just watched them come.

At the last possible moment, Bonaventure stepped aside, the SUVs scattering as Álvaro's loudspeaker car slammed to a halt in the center of the chaos.

Smoke poured from the tires.

Men in suits scrambled, weapons drawn.

But Álvaro stepped out first, test tube of anti-cool essence in hand.

He raised it high, voice booming—

"You want me? You've got me. But let's see if you're brave enough to face this."

Bonaventure, now standing just a few feet away, raised an eyebrow.

"The essence of anti-cool," he said, his voice cold, amused. "So you're playing with fire now."

Álvaro nodded. "You're the only source of cool I've got left. And I'm done running."

Bonaventure tilted his head, studying him.

Then, with a slow, dangerous smile, he said—

"Show me what you've got."

And just like that, the ultimate clash of cool and anti-cool was set to begin.

The standoff was tense.

Bonaventure stood tall, the very essence of composed, untouchable cool.

The anti-cool essence in Álvaro's hand swirled ominously.

The men in suits were on edge.

Everything was balanced on a knife's edge—until Borges opened his mouth.

"Hey, Bonny…"

Bonaventure’s cold stare shifted to the dog.

Borges grinned. "Couldn't get many girls in school, could you?"

A single, sharp breath.

Bonaventure’s jaw tightened.

A low, involuntary growl rumbled in his throat.

Pascal froze. "Men, what are you doing?!"

Álvaro, watching carefully, smirked. "Let him."

Borges tilted his head, eyes gleaming. "No girls danced with you, huh? Let alone went out with you?"

Bonaventure's fingers twitched. His shoulders tensed.

His teeth clenched.

Pascal, whispering, eyes wide, "Wait. He's… onto something."

Borges narrowed his eyes, voice smooth as silk. "First kiss in college, wasn't it?"

Bonaventure stiffened.

A muscle in his jaw twitched violently.

Pascal, staring in awe, whispered. "…Maybe."

Borges delivered the final blow.

"And for a lost bet, wasn't it?"

Bonaventure snapped.

His hands shook with rage. His breath was heavy.

Then—he bellowed, voice shaking with fury—

"KILL THEM! KILL THEM ALL!"

But—nobody moved.

Not because they were afraid.

Not because they were hesitant.

No.

Bonaventure's men were too busy laughing their asses off.

One wiped tears from his eyes. "Oh my God. A lost bet?!"

Another struggled to breathe. "This whole time, we thought he was untouchable—"

A third clapped his hands together, shaking his head. "—but he was a total NERD in school!"

Bonaventure turned red with rage.

Borges wagged his tail, grinning. "That's right, Bonny. You're not cool. You just became cool."

Álvaro, holding up the anti-cool test tube, smirked. "Which means… we don't need to extract any of your cool."

Pascal tilted his head. "Wait. We don't?"

Álvaro, grinning wide, eyes gleaming with realization, whispered—

"Because we just broke it."

And in that moment—Bonaventure's empire of cool came crashing down.

The laughter of his men still echoed around him.

But Bonaventure wasn't hearing it anymore.

He stood rigid, eyes dark and unreadable, his carefully maintained image of control and untouchable cool cracking at the edges.

And then—Álvaro finally understood.

He took a slow step forward, voice softer now, no longer mocking—but knowing.

"Bonaventure… the cool was never for you, was it?"

A sharp inhale.

Bonaventure's nostrils flared slightly. His lips trembled.

A single, almost imperceptible sniff.

Álvaro tilted his head, watching him carefully.

"Bullies made you chase it, didn't they?"

Another sniff.

Álvaro didn’t stop. He couldn’t. The truth was unraveling in front of him.

"They made you chase it back to the past."

Bonaventure stared down at the pavement.

His hands shook. His breath came faster.

Another sniff.

Two.

Álvaro, voice gentle but relentless, pressed on.

"And you built a time machine for that, didn't you?"

Silence.

The suits weren't laughing anymore.

Bonaventure's shoulders shook.

Álvaro, eyes sharp, voice knowing, whispered—

"Because you are a genius… a nerd genius, aren't you?"

The words hit like a hammer.

Bonaventure finally broke.

A single, ragged sob tore from his throat.

Then another.

Then another.

Until finally—he collapsed to his knees, hands covering his face, crying uncontrollably.

Borges, always the first to sense sincerity, was the first to move.

He stepped forward slowly, then rushed in—pressing his warm, furry body against Bonaventure's chest.

A soft whimper. A slobbery, wet dog kiss against his cheek.

And for the first time in his entire life, Bonaventure let someone comfort him.

His men watched in stunned silence.

Pascal, ears lowered, whispered, "…Holy shit. That actually worked."

Álvaro let out a long breath, crouching down beside them.

"It's over, Bonaventure. You don't have to chase it anymore."

And just like that, the time-traveling, cool-obsessed, paradox-causing empire that Bonaventure had built… collapsed in on itself.

Bonaventure shuddered, still on his knees, Borges pressed against him.

For the first time in his life, the weight of his obsession, his pursuit of cool, the endless chase… it was all laid bare.

But Álvaro wasn't done.

He crouched down, eyes locked onto Bonaventure's, voice steady.

"Bonaventure, I know you just got a drop of the Cool. But hear me out now…"

Bonaventure sniffed, wiping his face, his breathing still shaky.

Álvaro leaned in closer.

"The universe is in danger."

A pause.

Bonaventure blinked, still trembling. But something in his posture shifted.

Fear. Not for himself. But for something bigger.

Álvaro saw it. And then he asked the only question that mattered.

"Tell me… who did you get the Cool for?"

Bonaventure froze.

His hands tightened into fists.

His jaw clenched.

His eyes—red-rimmed, raw—filled with something new.

Terror.

Pascal immediately noticed. His tail flicked uneasily. "Oh no."

Borges stepped back slightly, sensing something shifting in the air.

Álvaro waited, barely breathing.

Bonaventure's lips parted slightly. His throat bobbed as he swallowed hard.

—the sky ripped open.

A shadow streaked downward. Fast. Too fast.

THUD.

The corpse of the orange and pink-haired dwarf crashed down from above, slamming directly onto Bonaventure.

The impact was instant. Brutal.

Bones cracked. Organs ruptured.

Bonaventure was dead before he even realized what hit him.

His final moment—not in battle, not in a blaze of cool, but crushed under a falling, topless dwarf.

Her final act of defiance: a last, involuntary flash.

Borges, stunned, ears pinned back, whispered.

"Oh my God."

Pascal, staring in pure horror, murmured.

"That… did not just happen."

Álvaro, still crouched, covered in a fine mist of whatever used to be Bonaventure, exhaled slowly.

Then, finally—he spoke.

"What the actual fuck."

Silence.

Nothing moved.

The suits—formerly Bonaventure's men—stood frozen in place, jaws slack, unable to process the sheer absurdity of what had just transpired.

The air was thick with disbelief.

Borges licked his lips. "Okay. Okay. Uh. New plan?"

Pascal shook his head, still staring at the twitching, topless corpse of the dwarf. "We don't need a plan. Reality is already unraveling on its own."

Álvaro, slowly standing up, wiped blood (and possibly other bodily fluids) off his coat.

"Alright."

As the group stared at the surreal aftermath, the sky lit up again.

But this time—it wasn't another body.

A neon-pink parachute, glowing against the night, floated gently down from above.

It swayed in the wind before landing just a few steps from them, attached to…

A rock.

Álvaro, still wiping the remnants of Bonaventure from his coat, furrowed his brow and stepped forward.

He crouched, picking up the rock, feeling the weight of it in his hand.

On the bottom of the rock, scrawled in pencil, were the words:

“We have Petunia. Stop your chase, and you’ll see her again.”
The Stakes Just Got Higher

Borges, standing by Álvaro's side, stared at the message.

His tail stiffened. "Oh no. Oh HELL no. They've got Miss Petunia?!"

Pascal, still perched on the wrecked loudspeaker car, narrowed his eyes. "They just made the dumbest mistake of their lives."

Álvaro's grip on the rock tightened, his jaw clenching.

"This just got personal."

Borges paced, growling softly. "What do we do, man? What's the move? We can't just stop."

Pascal, tail flicking, muttered darkly. "Stopping isn't an option. They're playing games. We need to play harder."

Álvaro, eyes locked on the message, exhaled slowly.

He pocketed the rock, his mind racing.

"Alright."

He turned to Borges and Pascal, his expression deadly serious.

"We're not stopping. We're not slowing down. If they think they can use Petunia against us…"

His voice dropped, filled with quiet rage.

"…they're going to regret ever crossing us."

Álvaro turned the rock over in his hands, his face unreadable.

Then, calmly, firmly, he said—

"We are stopping, alright."

Borges blinked. "Wait. What?"

Pascal twitched an ear. "Excuse me?"

Álvaro tossed the rock into the air, caught it, then looked at them seriously.

"What's in it for us? Solving some grand mystery? For what?"

He exhaled sharply, shaking his head.

"We can play detective all we want, but our lovely neighbor is in danger. That's the only thing that matters right now."

He pointed at them, voice unwavering.

"I'm getting her back. I'm putting her in her favorite rocking chair, tucking her in, and then—maybe—we think about the rest."

Pascal flicked his tail, deadpan. "Rocking chair? Man, the girl has a whole gaming station. She downs edibles and plays GTA all night."

Álvaro paused.

Then sighed. "Yeah, well… we'll tuck her into her gaming station, then."

Borges wagged his tail, nodding. "Alright. No arguments here. We get Petunia first. Everything else can burn."

Pascal hopped onto the hood of the wrecked loudspeaker car, stretching. "So what's the plan, boss?"

Álvaro grinned darkly.

"We're going to make them regret thinking we'd ever play by their rules."
Pascal squinted. "What do you even mean by that?"

Álvaro tossed the rock aside, brushing the dust off his hands.

Then, with absolute certainty, he said—

"We're going home."

Borges blinked. "…Home?"

Álvaro nodded. "Yep. We're going home. We're getting baked on edibles, and we're doing absolutely nothing for a month."

Pascal's ears perked up. "Oh my God."

Álvaro continued, pacing now, laying it all out.

"We don't look for clues. We don’t try to solve anything. We don’t even go out for shopping—I'll have the students do that."

Borges tilted his head. "Boss, no!"

Pascal, grinning wide, tail flicking eagerly. "FINALLY! Finally some sense into this man!"

Álvaro exhaled dramatically, staring at the night sky. "And you know what? I’m drinking again."

Borges yelped. "NO!"

Pascal hissed approvingly. "YES!"

And in the distant night, as if reality itself was reacting to this decision…

A faint, collective cheer echoed from liquor stores everywhere.

"YIPPEE!"

Borges whined, ears back. "Boss, this is reckless!"

Pascal grinned like a devil. "This is perfect."

Álvaro grinned. "Think about it. They want us to chase them. They expect us to fight back. They kidnapped Petunia thinking it would force us into action."

He tapped his temple. "So we do the one thing they never saw coming: Nothing."

Borges squinted. "And how exactly does this help?"

Álvaro smirked. "Because they can't afford for us to stop."

Pascal laughed. "He's right! If we just sit back and exist like degenerate sloths, they have to make a move. And when they do?"

Álvaro snapped his fingers. "We strike."

Borges sighed deeply. "I hate that this makes sense."

Pascal stretched luxuriously. "I love that this makes sense."

Álvaro grinned. "Alright, boys. Let's go home. Let's get baked. Let's ignore the world."

And as they piled into whatever transportation was still operational, the game had officially changed.

Their enemies wanted a fight.

Instead—they were about to get a masterclass in psychological warfare.

By doing absolutely nothing.

The students came through, as they always did—overprepared, slightly concerned, but ultimately enabling.

They delivered the essentials like a sacred ritual of hedonistic survival.
The Stash:

✓ Meat for chili (because everyone baked or drunk always makes chili… always.)
✓ Tortillas (because tacos happen when patience runs out.)
✓ Canned chili (because everyone baked or drunk forgets to turn on the stove or burns everything.)
✓ A big bag of pot (because edibles eventually wear off.)
✓ Two boxes of bourbon (because when life makes no sense, you drink until it does.)

The students looked on as the supplies were inventoried, some in admiration, some in concern, all in deep, silent respect.

One of them, a particularly eager young man, adjusted his glasses. "Are you sure this is the best way to—"

Álvaro, already halfway through pouring a glass of bourbon, waved a hand. "Son, you're asking questions to which you already know the answer."

The student nodded solemnly. "Fair enough."

Borges immediately ripped into a bag of tortillas, wagging his tail. "This is the best apocalypse ever."

Pascal, rolling an unopened can of chili between his paws, sighed with deep satisfaction. "Finally.

No running, no thinking, just pure, unfiltered nothingness."

Álvaro clinked his glass against the nearest bourbon bottle. "To the art of doing absolutely nothing."

They sat back.

They lit up.

They got comfortable.

And outside—their enemies stewed in frustration, waiting for them to make a move that wasn't coming.

They wanted a war.

They were about to get a blackout instead.

TWO WEEKS LATER

The students pushed open the door, bracing themselves for whatever horrifying, existentially confusing scene awaited them.

And they found it.

Right there, in the center of the room, Álvaro, Borges, and Pascal sat in a cloud of bourbon fumes, pot smoke, and the lingering scent of poorly ventilated chili cooking.

They were locked in an intense, possibly world-altering debate.

Álvaro, gesturing wildly with a tortilla in hand, declared—

"I'm telling you—grilled shrimp is a noumenon."

Pascal, fur bristling in frustration, countered—

"No! The taste of shrimp is subjective! You don't experience the shrimp itself, only the perception of shrimp!"

Borges, wagging his tail aggressively, added—

"But shrimp has physical form! You can hold it! You can smell it! You can even eat it!"

Álvaro, waving a chili-stained spoon like a philosopher king, pointed at Borges.

"Ah, but do you experience the true shrimp, or only the idea of shrimp projected through your sensory faculties?"

Pascal groaned. "Oh my God, I regret starting this."

The students exchanged glances.

One of them, a brave soul, cleared his throat.

"Professor… have you considered… just a hypothesis… you know, just the idea of… a shower?"

Silence.

Álvaro, still deep in his bourbon-fueled philosophizing, blinked at them.

Then, slowly, he leaned back, exhaling.

"What is a shower?"

The students tensed.

They had seen this before.

He was about to philosophize his way out of bathing.

"Is a real shower only the one I experience? Or is it the image of a shower we all share in collective memory?"

The students groaned.

One of them, pinching the bridge of his nose, sighed.

"Professor… shower is what they are begging for at the gas station down the street."

Another nodded urgently. "They say they can't smell gasoline anymore. You've broken them."

Pascal sniffed the air and immediately recoiled. "Oh shit, they're right."

Borges, ears back, looked at his own fur. "I don't even remember what I used to smell like."

Álvaro, finally blinking as if coming out of a trance, frowned.

Then, he took a deep inhale through his nose.

He immediately regretted it.

His face twisted.

His eyes watered.

He dropped his tortilla.

And, with the weight of two weeks of pure, unfiltered filth hitting him all at once, Álvaro finally muttered—

"I have made a mistake."

And just like that—they finally conceded to the necessity of hygiene.

Álvaro, still shaken from the existential confrontation with his own stench, finally stepped into the shower.

Not just any shower—a marathon of scrubbing, rinsing, and existential acceptance.

Borges stared at the bathtub, ears pinned back.

"Boss, no. We don't need this. I'm fine. I'm clean!"

Pascal, already clawing at the doorframe, hissed. "I'll never forgive you for this, Álvaro!"

But Álvaro, rejuvenated from his own cleansing, was having none of it.

"If I had to endure it, you're coming with me."

And so—Borges and Pascal were forcefully bathed.

✓ Borges tried to jump out of the tub three times before succumbing to defeat.
✓ Pascal clawed a small section of Álvaro's arm, though his protests eventually turned to sullen glares of betrayal.
✓ By the end, the tub looked like a battlefield, but the trio emerged clean for the first time in weeks.

Meanwhile, the students worked tirelessly to restore some semblance of livability to the house.

They opened every window, cranked up industrial fans, and dragged half the furniture into the yard.

Some items were deemed too far gone to save.

"The couch smells like it ate a chili pot and died," one student muttered.

"Burn it," another replied grimly.

In the yard, a small bonfire roared, fueled by:

A mildewed rug.
Several unidentifiable cushions.
A chair that reeked of bourbon and regret.
Half the books Borges had peed on during the chaos.

Aftermath: the house smelled faintly of lavender and scorched upholstery.

Álvaro stood in his newly freshened living room, towel draped over his neck.

Borges, wrapped in another towel, shook water droplets everywhere.

Pascal, still glaring, muttered. "If anyone mentions this ever again, I will destroy them."

One of the students looked at the group and sighed.

"Professor… let's not wait two weeks next time."

Álvaro nodded solemnly.

"Agreed. But… no promises."

Álvaro, freshly showered, towel draped over his shoulders, sprawled onto a newly disinfected chair.

He snapped his fingers at a nearby student.

"Make me an Old Fashioned."

The student blinked. "Professor?"

Álvaro waved a hand, reclining further. "An Old Fashioned, boy. Chip chip, on the double."

The student, brow furrowed, turned to the others and mouthed—

"Old Fashion what?"

Álvaro sighed dramatically.

"It's a cocktail, boy. A classic."

The student hesitated. "Prof, I don't know if—"

Álvaro sat up, eyes suddenly sharp, his voice shifting into full professor mode.

"Either that…" he said, his tone dangerously serious, "or you tell me, in excruciating detail, about Plato's Allegory of the Cave."

Silence.

The students froze.

Then, as if controlled by a single hive mind, they all immediately whipped out their phones, furiously searching cocktail recipes.

Borges snorted. "That was evil."

Pascal, stretching lazily, muttered. "That was effective."

Álvaro leaned back again, smirking.

"Philosophy is the art of motivation."

The following weeks passed in a glorious haze of hedonism, delegation, and expertly crafted cocktails.

Álvaro, Borges, and Pascal had fully embraced their roles as the laziest, most indulged trio in existence.

Meanwhile, the students—somehow both exasperated and strangely devoted—did everything.

Daily Routine of the Lazy Pigs™

Morning:

☀️ Wake up at noon. Maybe.

🧉 Sip expertly made Old Fashioneds before breakfast. (Because at this point, time was meaningless.)

📖 Half-heartedly read some book that never gets finished.

Afternoon:

🍗 Demand food, usually chili, steak, or more questionable snacks.

🍽️ Consume industrial amounts of edibles.

🛋️ Lie around debating irrelevant philosophy. ("If I'm drunk but remember everything, am I really drunk?")

Evening:

🍹 Drink an unholy amount of Old Fashioneds.

🎮 Watch Pascal dominate in GTA while stoned. (Miss Petunia would be proud.)

🐕 Borges begs for food and is consistently rewarded.

🛌 Fall asleep in a pile of lazy satisfaction.

The Industrialization of the Old Fashioned

By week three, the students had perfected the art of making Old Fashioneds.

✓ Bitters were stocked in bulk.

✓ Bourbon flowed like water.

✓ Ice cubes were specially prepared for optimal chill.

✓ Orange peels were pre-cut and curated for maximum aroma.

One student, half-proud, half-ashamed, whispered to another—

"I think… I think I could open a speakeasy now."

Another, staring at his perfectly balanced drink, muttered—

"We've created an empire… and I don't know how to feel about it."

Absolute Sloth, Absolute Power

Álvaro, Pascal, and Borges had become legendary figures of laziness.

Borges, belly full, sprawled on the floor. "I was born for this life."

Pascal, curled in a patch of sunlight, muttered. "I don't care about the universe anymore."

Álvaro, staring at the ceiling with a drink in hand, exhaled. "If the world ends, they can wake me up."

And so, for weeks, the universe could wait.

Because comfort had become an art form.

Weeks of indulgence, Old Fashioneds, and absolute inertia had lulled the trio into a blissful detachment from reality.

But reality wasn't done with them.

A knock at the door.

Álvaro, half-drunk, half-baked, groaned. "Ugh… students, if it's the milk delivery, just bring it in."

A pause.

Another knock. Louder. Urgent.

Borges, ears perking up, sniffed the air. "Uh… boss, something's off."

Pascal, grumbling, hopped off his perch. "Fine. Fine. I'll get it."

Álvaro dragged himself up, shuffled to the door, and swung it open.

Standing there was a man.

A man in a state of pure, existential horror.

His eyes wide, his breath ragged.

He stared at Álvaro, lips trembling, and spoke.

"Do we, in our time, have an answer to the question of what we really mean by the word 'being'?"

A pause.

"Not at all."

And then—he collapsed.

Face-first. Dead.

A dagger protruded from his back.

Pinned to it—a single sheet of paper.

The trio stared at the body, then at each other, then back at the dagger.

Álvaro, sighing, reached forward, carefully pulling the paper free.

A single sentence was scrawled across it.

"Do you want to be or not to be? That is your question."

Silence.

Borges licked his lips. "Welp. That's ominous."

Pascal, tail flicking, muttered. "We were two Old Fashioneds away from never opening that door."

Álvaro exhaled, rubbing his face.

"Alright. Fine. I guess we're doing this now."

Álvaro stared at the dead man on his doorstep.

The words still hung in the air—what the man had gasped out before collapsing into the void.

"Do we, in our time, have an answer to the question of what we really mean by the word ‘being’?"

"Not at all."

Álvaro rubbed his face, sighed deeply, and muttered.

"What he said. That’s the beginning of Being and Time."

Borges tilted his head. "Wait. Like… Heidegger?"

Pascal, already digging his claws into the paper attached to the dagger, hissed. "Are you telling me someone just got murdered over an existential ontology debate?"

Álvaro exhaled, stepping over the body, still reading the note.

"'Do you want to be or not to be? That is your question.'"

Silence.

Borges rolled onto his back, covering his snout with his paws. "I hate when philosophy turns into murder."

Pascal twitched his tail. "You love when philosophy turns into murder."

Borges grinned. "Okay, yeah, but not on our doorstep!"

Álvaro, grumbling, stretched his arms. "Alright. Fine. We're back in it. Time to figure out who thinks philosophy is worth stabbing people over."

Pascal, dryly, "Hint: Probably a Heideggerian."

Borges snorted. "Or an anti-Heideggerian."

Álvaro sighed. "Either way, grab me another Old Fashioned. This is gonna be a long night."

Just as Álvaro processed the full philosophical absurdity of the situation, a familiar, unwelcome sound cut through the air.

Sirens.

Flashing red and blue lights reflected off the windows.

The police.

Or at least—someone dressed like them.

Borges groaned, rolling onto his stomach. "Oh, come on! Again?!"

Pascal, ears flicking with irritation, muttered, "I swear, the next person who dies on this doorstep is getting launched into the street before we even open the door."

Álvaro, resigned to the inevitable farce of existence, sighed deeply and cracked his neck.

Real cops? Fake cops?

Either way, it was a problem.

Two officers arrived.

Stern. Cold. Professional.

Looked at the fresh corpse.

Sprawled just past the threshold.

Another body. Another dagger in the back. Another cryptic message.

A perfect repetition of last time.

Álvaro, without even blinking, turned to Borges and Pascal.

"Okay. Now it's just getting lazy."

Borges squinted at the "officers." "So… we taking bets? Real cops or fake cops?"

Pascal stretched, yawning. "One way to find out."

Álvaro crossed his arms, looking directly at the so-called authorities.

"Alright, gentlemen. Before I let you in, tell me something…

He pointed at the corpse.

"What does being mean to you?"

Silence.

The "officers" exchanged glances. Hesitated, their stoic expressions flickering.

The one on the left, clearly caught off guard, muttered, "Being? Uh… existence?"

The second officer stiffened, jaw tightening. He said nothing, his hand hovering near his holster.

Borges snorted. "Yep. Fake cops. Called it."

Pascal, sitting on the windowsill, flicked his tail. "Either they're fake, or they genuinely suck at metaphysics."

Álvaro, stepping forward, pointed at the corpse. "This is getting old. Who sent you? And why do people keep dying on my doorstep?"

The "officer" on the right narrowed his eyes. "Step aside, Professor. This is official business."

Álvaro, rolling his eyes, muttered, "Official business my ass."

Without warning, Pascal jumped from the sill, landing gracefully in front of the "officers."

"I don't think you're here for justice," Pascal hissed, his fur bristling. "And I definitely don't think you're here for philosophy."

Borges, stepping beside Pascal, growled. "So, who's it gonna be? You tell us the truth, or we find out the messy way?"

The "officers" stiffened, clearly weighing their options.

Álvaro, bored now, waved a hand. "Oh, come on. Drop the act. You're not cops. You're here for the same nonsense as everyone else. So, let's skip the pretense and get to the part where you explain the cryptic murder messages."

The second officer, teeth clenched, finally growled, "We're not here to explain anything. We're here to stop you."

The first officer reached for his weapon, but Borges lunged first, grabbing his arm and knocking him backward.

Pascal, quick as lightning, leapt onto the second officer's chest, claws bared, forcing him to drop his gun.

Álvaro, grabbing the dagger from the corpse's back, spun it in his hand.

"Alright, boys. Let's see who's really behind this."

The fight was brief, chaotic, and ultimately one-sided.

Borges and Pascal were relentless.

Álvaro, despite his usual laziness, had surprising precision with the dagger.

Within moments, the "officers" were subdued, tied up with zip ties the students had left behind during one of their cleaning sprees.

Álvaro crouched down, holding the dagger lazily in one hand.

"Now, let's try this again. Who sent you? And why the hell are people dying for Heidegger?"

The first man, still trying to catch his breath, spat, "You'll never stop it. You're already part of it."

Pascal, sitting on the tied-up man's chest, hissed. "Part of what?"

The second man, his lip bleeding, smirked darkly.

"It’s not about you. It’s about what you’ve found. What you’ve started."

Álvaro leaned in closer, his voice deadly calm.

"And what, exactly, have I started?"

The man’s smile widened, blood dripping from his teeth.

"The unraveling of reality."

Silence.

Borges whimpered softly. "Oh, great. That again."

Pascal sighed. "I swear, we can't have one normal day."

Álvaro, standing up and tossing the dagger to the side, muttered, "Looks like we're back in the game."

Because clearly, the universe wasn't going to let them rest just yet.

Álvaro paced the room, whiskey in hand, staring down at the two bound men who had just declared that reality itself was unraveling.

Borges, still standing over one of them, sighed. "Alright, let's stop pretending we understand anything. Somebody please explain how the hell Fonzie's cool, Heidegger, and Kant are all connected."

Pascal hopped onto the table, eyes narrowed. "Yeah, because right now, it looks like we've been dragged into a full-blown ontological conspiracy, and I refuse to believe this is just about 'Being and Time'."

Álvaro, taking a long sip of whiskey, finally exhaled.

"Alright. Let's break this down."

Álvaro set his glass down, rubbing his temples.

"We know that Fonzie's cool isn't just a personality trait. It's a force. A fundamental principle that operates at the very core of social physics. It bends probability, reshapes

perception, and exerts an inexplicable influence over reality."

Borges nodded slowly. "Right. Pascal turned into a teenage high school starlet when Fonzie just said 'Hey there, kitty'."

Pascal scowled. "We're never bringing that up again."

Álvaro continued.

"We also know that Bonaventure was chasing it. Trying to duplicate it, trying to use it. And he built a damn time machine in the process."

Álvaro picked up the bloodstained note attached to the dagger and held it up.

"'Do you want to be or not to be? That is your question.'"

He let the words sink in.

"This is more than just a Shakespeare joke. This is full-blown Heideggerian metaphysics. Heidegger wasn't just interested in being—he was obsessed with the meaning of being. And more importantly… how we experience it."

Pascal blinked. "…You're saying somebody is messing with Being itself?"

Álvaro nodded. "And Fonzie's cool? It's a manifestation of authentic being."

Borges tilted his head. "Oh no. I don't like where this is going."

Álvaro grabbed a napkin, scribbling notes furiously.

"Kant split reality into two things—phenomena, which is what we experience, and noumena, which is what things actually are outside of our perception."

Pascal groaned. "Okay, but what does that have to do with Fonzie?"

Álvaro snapped his fingers.

"Fonzie's cool is noumenal. It's a force we experience, but we can't fully define it. It is, but it's beyond our direct understanding. It's an ideal form—pure charisma, pure confidence, untouchable and eternal."

Borges blinked. "So you're saying Fonzie is Plato's Forms but in leather?"

Álvaro pointed at him. "Exactly."

Pascal narrowed his eyes. "And Bonaventure? He tried to bottle it. He tried to take something noumenal and turn it into phenomena."

Álvaro snapped his fingers again.

"Yes! He tried to reduce it to something observable, something measurable—but the second you do that, it stops being what it truly is."

Borges groaned. "So, let me get this straight. You're saying that by trying to define cool, by

trying to control it, Bonaventure accidentally punched a hole in reality?"

Álvaro nodded grimly.

"He didn't just screw with time. He screwed with ontology itself."

Silence.

The bound men on the floor smirked.

One of them, his lip bleeding, whispered:

"Now you're starting to see it."

Pascal, fur bristling, exhaled sharply. "You're saying that reality is coming apart… because of Fonzie's Cool?"

Álvaro downed the rest of his whiskey.

"No. Because someone tried to own cool. And you can't own something that exists in the noumenal realm."

Borges swallowed hard. "So what happens now?"

Álvaro picked up the dagger, twirling it absently.

"Now? We find out who's really behind this. And we stop them before they erase the very concept of Being itself."

Silence.

Pascal groaned, burying his face in his paws.

"Goddammit, I was enjoying doing nothing."

Borges sighed, stretching. "So, we're back to being reality's least qualified defenders?"

Álvaro grinned darkly.

"Looks like it."

And with that, the absurd investigation into the metaphysical collapse of existence began.

Álvaro, Borges, and Pascal stood in stunned silence as the realization settled in.

Reality itself was tearing at the seams.

Álvaro paced, whiskey in hand, staring at the bound men.

"So that's why people keep falling from the sky."

Pascal blinked, sitting up. "What?"

Álvaro, gesturing wildly, continued. "The space-time continuum is so stretched now that sometimes it rips. People get swallowed in one place and reappear in another—sometimes meters above the ground."

Borges tilted his head. "Wait… so all the falling corpses, the random people dropping out of nowhere—it's not random? It's the breakdown of reality itself?"

Álvaro nodded. "Exactly."

Pascal, ears flattening, muttered. "Great. Love that for us."

Borges, ears twitching, frowned. "Wait… but only people, right?"

And then—

BOOM.

A thunderous crash tore through the ceiling.

Splinters of wood, shards of brick, and chunks of drywall rained down.

And then—

A massive bank safe—old, iron-reinforced, the kind that shouldn't just appear out of nowhere—came plummeting through the roof.

Right onto the two fake police officers.

There was a wet, horrifying crunch.

Then—silence.

Pascal stared.

Borges stared.

Álvaro, blinking slowly, calmly wiped a splatter of fake-police blood from his eye.

Then, in the flattest voice possible, he muttered—

"Apparently, no. Not only people."

Borges, still processing, sat down. "Okay. So… just to recap. Not only are people falling out of the sky, but now random objects are too?"

Pascal, staring at the mangled remains of the fake cops under the safe, sighed.

"This is a really shitty way to launder money."

Álvaro, taking a deep breath, stepped toward the safe, brushing off debris.

"We need to figure out how bad this gets. Because if safes and bodies are falling…"

He paused, staring at the hole in the ceiling.

"What happens when something bigger comes through?"

The three of them stood in eerie silence.

Because they all knew the answer.

Reality was on the brink of total collapse.

And they were the only ones in a position to stop it.

Whether they liked it or not.

Álvaro, staring at the giant hole in his ceiling where a bank safe had just crushed two fake cops, slowly sat down, poured himself another Old Fashioned, and muttered.

"Alright. Who the hell wants reality to collapse? Cui prodest?"

Borges, licking his fur clean from whatever blood had splashed on him, frowned. "That's a good question. Who benefits from all this?"

Pascal, still perched on the wreckage, narrowed his eyes. "Who profits when existence itself stops making sense?"

Theory #1: Someone Wants Absolute Control

Álvaro leaned back, rubbing his temples.

"Let's start simple. If reality breaks down, what happens?"

Borges tilted his head. "People panic."

Pascal flicked his tail. "Governments collapse."

Álvaro nodded. "And when governments collapse, who steps in?"

Borges snorted. "The people who cause the collapse in the first place."

Pascal sighed. "So you're saying this could be manufactured chaos. Someone breaking reality so they can swoop in and put themselves in charge?"

Álvaro poured another drink. "Wouldn't be the first time someone tried to create a problem just so they could sell the solution."

Theory #2: A Cult of Metaphysical Nihilists

Borges, ear twitching, muttered. "Okay, but what if it's not just about power? What if it's ideological?"

Pascal, squinting at him. "You're suggesting we're dealing with some kind of reality-collapsing cult?"

Borges shrugged. "Look at the messages we've been getting. Everything is about Being, about cool, about existence itself. What if someone—some group—thinks reality is an illusion? A prison? And they want to tear it down completely?"

Álvaro, nodding slowly. "We've seen worse ideas become religions. If you take Heidegger way too

seriously, you can start thinking reality is a construct we chose to participate in. Maybe someone out there decided to opt out."

Pascal groaned. "Great. An entire cult of psychotic, ultra-philosophical anarchists who think reality itself is a scam. Love that for us."

Theory #3: The Wrong Person Got Hold of Time Travel

Álvaro pointed at the safe.

"That thing didn't just fall out of nowhere. It came from somewhen."

Borges frowned. "You think this is another time-travel problem?"

Álvaro sighed. "Look, Bonaventure built a time machine just to chase cool. Who's to say someone else didn't build one to tear everything apart?"

Pascal sat up, suddenly alarmed. "Oh no. You're saying someone figured out time travel and didn't have the self-restraint to not destroy the universe?"

Borges grinned. "I mean, that sounds exactly like humanity."

Álvaro leaned forward. "If time travel exists, someone out there has it. And if they have it, they might be using it to rip holes in reality. Maybe on purpose. Maybe by accident. Either way, we need to find out who."

The room was silent.

Then Borges cleared his throat.

"Alright. So where the hell do we even start?"

Then—Álvaro's eyes widened.

Borges perked up. "Oh no. Oh no."

Pascal, suddenly looking very, very tired, groaned. "You're not actually about to say what I think you're about to say."

Álvaro leaned forward, hands clasped together, voice dark and deliberate.

"Who wants absolute control?"

"Who runs a cult of metaphysical bullshit?"

"Who has been trying to rip reality apart to fit their worldview for centuries?"

Silence.

Then—Borges whispered the answer.

"Religion."

Álvaro nodded slowly. "And who wants absolute control of religion?"

Another pause.

Pascal, ears flattened, tail twitching, exhaled sharply.

"The Pope."

Borges let out a low whine. "Oh my God. It's the Vatican."

Álvaro stood up, pacing. "Think about it. The Catholic Church has been obsessed with controlling reality since the beginning. Heaven, Hell, divine authority, absolute truth—it's all about defining what reality is and keeping the masses inside that definition."

Pascal, groaning, covered his face. "You're telling me the Vatican is behind the existential collapse of the space-time continuum?"

Álvaro poured another drink. "Tell me it doesn't make sense."

Borges sat up, tail wagging slightly. "Oh no. It totally makes sense. That's why I hate it."

Why the Vatican?

1. Absolute Control Over Reality

✓ The Church has always dictated what is "true." From Galileo to Darwin, they've fought anyone who challenged their control over existence itself.

✓ If reality itself is in flux, they'd want to rewrite it in their favor.

✓ What better way to bring back absolute religious authority than to engineer a metaphysical catastrophe and offer salvation as the only solution?

2. Cult of Metaphysical Bullshit

✓ Catholic theology is already full of non-dualistic, ontological nightmares (transubstantiation, anyone?).

✓ The concept of "Being" is at the core of Christian philosophy.

✓ What if they're not just talking about it anymore? What if they're actively manipulating the nature of Being itself?

3. The Vatican's History with Time & Space Manipulation

✓ The Church has secret archives that supposedly contain forbidden knowledge, lost sciences, and unexplainable artifacts.

✓ The Vatican literally has an observatory. Why? What are they watching?

✓ The Jesuits have been linked to strange experiments, especially involving quantum mechanics and time anomalies.

✓ There's always been whispers of hidden technologies, lost relics of divine power, and forbidden texts that never saw the light of day.
The Final Piece: The Pope and Fonzie's Cool

Borges, slowly blinking, muttered. "Okay. But… what does Fonzie's Cool have to do with the Pope?"

Álvaro paused, considering.

Then—it clicked.

"Fonzie's Cool is pure, untouchable, noumenal Being. The Vatican doesn't have it. But they want it. They've always wanted it. They want control over that kind of power."

Pascal snorted. "Oh, so now the Pope wants to be cool?"

Álvaro grinned darkly. "Not just be cool. Define what cool is. And then make it theirs forever."

Silence.

Borges sighed. "This is the dumbest and most terrifying conspiracy we've ever been part of."

Pascal rolled onto his back, staring at the ceiling. "So what you're saying is, we have to stop the Pope from rewriting reality itself."

Álvaro poured another drink.

"Yep. We're about to go to war with the Vatican."

And just like that—things had escalated. Again.

Silence.

Borges tilted his head. "Okay, I know we just uncovered a Vatican-led reality-collapse conspiracy, but let's take a second and breathe."

Pascal, dead serious, nodded. "No, no, the man said it. We must kill the Pope."

Álvaro, pouring another drink, exhaled. "I mean, it is the logical conclusion. If the Vatican is behind this, and the Pope is at the top of the Vatican, then…"

He took a long sip.

"Yeah. We kill the Pope."

Borges whined. "Guys, do you have any idea what happens when you say things like that out loud?"

Pascal rolled his eyes. "Oh no, what's gonna happen, Borges? God's gonna smite us? The Jesuits are gonna show up at our door? News flash: we've already got corpses raining from the sky and bank safes dropping through our roof! What's a few angry priests at this point?!"

Álvaro grinned, eyes gleaming with manic energy.

"We're already on some kind of cosmic hit list. Might as well go all in."

Borges groaned, rubbing his paws over his face. "Do any of you actually have a plan for this, or are we just screaming treason at each other?"

Álvaro paced the room, thinking.

Borges, sighing, flopped onto the couch. "Look, all I'm saying is, this is huge. Assassinating the Pope isn't just some casual crime. It's—"

Pascal, interrupting. "Name one thing the Vatican hasn't done that's worse."

Borges opened his mouth. Closed it. Looked away.

Álvaro grinned. "Exactly."

Then Álvaro froze mid-step. His face shifted from confident assassin to deep, philosophical dread.

He turned slowly, eyes unfocused, gripped by an epiphany.

"Wait… wait!"

Pascal, already packing a small bag labeled ‘Rome or Bust’, looked up, annoyed. "What now?"

Álvaro grabbed his whiskey glass, swirling it absentmindedly. His voice was hushed, almost reverent.

"The Italians have a saying… ‘Morto un Papa, se ne fa un altro.’"

Borges tilted his head. "Which means…?"

Álvaro slowly turned to them, eyes burning with realization.

"It means ‘When one Pope dies, they just make another one.’"

Silence.

Pascal dropped his bag.

Borges stopped wagging his tail.

Álvaro set down his glass, fingers tightening into fists.

"Killing only the Pope is pointless. It's just a bandaid on a tumor. The institution survives. The machine keeps running. Reality will still be rewritten to fit their twisted theology. Unless…"

He took a deep breath.

"We destroy the whole Vatican."

The Room Goes Silent

Pascal blinked.

Borges blinked.

Pascal, finally, whispered.

"We're going to burn down the entire Vatican City?"

Álvaro, dead serious, nodded. "Yes."

Borges, ears flat, muttered. "This is going to be the worst thing we've ever done."

Pascal grinned like a demon. "This is going to be the best thing we've ever done."

Álvaro exhaled deeply. "We're not just talking about an assassination. We're talking about erasing the entire structure—the Vatican Library, the archives, the political machine, the infrastructure—everything."

Borges groaned. "Okay. Just so I'm clear, we've officially moved from killing one guy to committing a full-blown act of war against the world's most powerful religious entity?"

Álvaro nodded. "Correct."

Pascal tilted his head. "And? What's the problem?"

Borges whimpered. "The Swiss Guard has actual guns. The Vatican has secrets we don't even know about. They've existed for over a thousand years, and you think we, a washed-up professor, a dog, and a grumpy cat, are going to destroy them?"

Álvaro, grinning like a madman, poured another drink.

"Yes. That's exactly what I think."

Borges sighed, looking up at the ceiling as if praying to a God he no longer believed in. "Guys… do we really want to do this?"

Pascal hopped onto the table, tail flicking. "It's us or them, Borges. If we don't stop them, they're going to rewrite reality to fit their garbage theology. You think I want a world where I have to confess my sins before getting fed?"

Borges groaned. "I mean… okay, that is bad."

Álvaro exhaled, standing up. His voice was softer this time.

"Look, I know what we're saying is insane. But if we don't act, the Vatican will redefine what

existence is. This isn't just a power struggle. It's an ontological war."

Silence.

Borges, after a long pause, muttered.

"We're going to Hell for this."

Pascal grinned. "Oh, buddy, we booked that trip a long time ago."

Álvaro grabbed his coat. "Pack your bags, gentlemen. We're going to Rome."

ON THE PLANE

The plane hummed quietly, the lights dimmed for the long-haul flight to Rome.

The trio was settled in their seats, surrounded by unsuspecting passengers who had no idea they were sitting next to the soon-to-be destroyers of the Vatican.

Álvaro reclined slightly, reached into his coat, and carefully pulled out the small test tube.

It gleamed under the dim cabin lights—the essence of anti-cool.

Pascal, glancing at it, narrowed his eyes. "You sure that's safe to have in your pocket?"

Álvaro twirled it in his fingers, grinning. "It's under 100 ml. Totally fine for carry-on."

Borges, ears twitching, frowned. "Guys… remember what Doc Brown said?"

He cleared his throat, dramatically lowering his voice to mimic Brown's frenzied warnings.

"When cool meets anti-cool… stay away hundreds of meters."

Álvaro nodded. "Right. And don't forget the goggles."

Borges wagged his tail nervously. "Right, the goggles… which means it must be a hell of an explosion."

Silence.

Pascal blinked. "So… we're blowing up the Vatican?"

Álvaro turned to him, his face slowly stretching into an all-too-familiar, utterly unhinged grin.

Beside him, Borges mirrored the exact same expression.

That wild-eyed, madman's smile—the kind that only belonged to Klaus Kinski in Fitzcarraldo when he dragged a steamboat over a mountain just because he could.

"YES!"

The passenger in the seat across the aisle immediately pressed the flight attendant call button.

The trio sat in silence, staring at the test tube of anti-cool, the most dangerous ontological weapon ever conceived.

Pascal, tail flicking, finally broke the tension. “Alright. Big question. How the hell do we actually make cool and anti-cool touch?”

Borges, tilting his head, muttered. “Yeah. We can’t just, like… shake them in a jar. If Doc Brown was right, this isn’t just an explosion—it’s a full-blown ontological collapse.”

Álvaro, smirking, exhaled. “We need to think big. We need to think… cinematic.”

Pascal, squinting at the ceiling of the airplane, muttered. "Wait, wait, wait. You ever notice something weird?"

Álvaro, halfway through sketching a Vatican infiltration plan on a napkin, paused. "What?"

Pascal sat up. "Rome. Summer. It's an oven. Everyone is sweating like sinners in church. Except… the Pope. You ever seen him looking like a sweaty mozzarella? Ever seen him with a regatta stained with sugo like a normal Roman?"

Borges, ears perking up, blinked. "Oh. Oh no."

Pascal grinned wickedly. "They have air conditioning, don't they?"

Silence.

Álvaro, slowly, dangerously, started to smile.

Borges, whispering. "Oh my God."

Pascal, nodding. "And where does that air conditioning system circulate?"

Álvaro, eyes gleaming. "Through the entire Vatican."

They looked at each other.

Then at the test tube of anti-cool.

Then back at each other.

And grinned.

Step 1: Infiltrate the Vatican's Maintenance System

✓ Vatican City has one of the most advanced climate control systems in Europe.
✓ The air vents circulate through every major building, including St. Peter's Basilica and the Pope's private chambers.
✓ The system is discreet, rarely accessed, and completely overlooked by security.
Step 2: Introduce Anti-Cool to the Vatican's Air Supply

✓ Acquire access to the main A/C intake system.
✓ Introduce anti-cool into the air circulation unit.
✓ As it spreads, it neutralizes ALL traces of cool.

Step 3: Watch the Vatican Implode in Existential Crisis

✓ The Pope and high-ranking clergy, stripped of their aura of power, suddenly feel like ordinary men.

✓ The Vatican's spiritual mystique crumbles under the sheer weight of anti-cool.

✓ The sheer contradiction between centuries of authority and sudden human vulnerability causes a metaphysical short-circuit.

✓ The collapse of Papal Cool triggers an ontological explosion—reality itself rejects the contradiction.

✓ The Vatican implodes into a void of philosophical paradox.

Borges: "We're going to kill the Pope with air conditioning?"

Álvaro, nodding. "It's poetic, really. The Vatican has been dictating reality for centuries, but they forgot one thing."

Pascal, grinning. "They breathe reality like the rest of us."

Borges, staring out the airplane window in horror. "I can't believe we're about to commit theological terrorism through HVAC sabotage."

Álvaro, leaning back in his seat, smirking. "When in Rome, my friend."

The plan was set.

Reality was about to get very uncomfortable for the Vatican.

IN ROME

The night was warm, thick with the humid weight of Rome in summer.

The trio moved carefully, navigating the quiet alleyways of Vatican City, past the Swiss Guard, past the tourists taking selfies in front of history.

They weren't here for history.

They were here to erase it.

NIGHT

They slipped into a restricted maintenance tunnel, dodging motion sensors and bored security guards.

Borges, sniffing the air, whispered. "I smell freon. We're close."

Pascal hopped onto a control panel, scanning the system map. "Here. The central intake vent. This circulates through everything—the Basilica, the Archives, the Pope's residence. The whole Vatican breathes through this system."

Álvaro pulled out the small test tube of anti-cool, its contents swirling like liquid paradox.

He strapped it securely to the vent with duct tape, connecting it to a wireless detonator.

Then, stepping back, he took a deep breath.

"Gentlemen. We are about to commit metaphysical terrorism."

Borges wagged his tail. "Let's blow up a religion."

Pascal grinned. "Requiescant in pace, motherfuckers."

With the button armed, they slipped away into the night.

NIGHT, LATER

They positioned themselves far, far away.

From the Terrazza del Pincio, they had a perfect panoramic view of St. Peter's Basilica, the Vatican, the seat of absolute control.

The three of them sat on the railing, wearing dark sunglasses like deranged philosophers conducting a nuclear test.

Álvaro held up the detonator, took one last breath, and pressed the button.

Click.

A pulse of energy surged through the wireless signal.

The anti-cool vial shattered inside the air vent.

For a moment—nothing.

Then—

A single, deafening crack.

Followed by a low, rolling tremor.

The air inside Vatican City shifted unnaturally, a wave of pressure folding over itself as something deeper than physics began to react.

And then—

The Vatican blew up.

Like a Catholic Hiroshima.

A brilliant white explosion erupted from the Basilica, spiraling outward in pure conceptual annihilation.

The Dome of St. Peter's shattered in slow motion, its fragments dissolving into

philosophical paradox before they even hit the ground.

The Swiss Guard were lifted off their feet and sucked into the vortex of collapsing Cool, their uniforms instantly turning into sweatpants and Crocs.

The entire Vatican City crumbled, but not like a building—like an idea that had been forcibly rejected by reality itself.

The Sistine Chapel peeled off its own walls, Michelangelo's frescoes screaming in existential agony as the weight of centuries of dogma collapsed into pure nothingness.

The archives—the hidden knowledge, the forbidden texts—evaporated into an unsolvable riddle.

And at the epicenter—where the Pope once stood—only a void remained.

The shockwave passed through Rome, but didn't touch it.

This wasn't an explosion of destruction.

It was an explosion of correction.

A reset button pressed on centuries of forced reality.

Álvaro lowered the detonator, watching the Vatican collapse into ontological nonexistence.

Borges slowly removed his safety glasses, blinking.

Pascal exhaled, ears twitching. "Holy fuck."

Álvaro took a deep breath, wiped his hands on his pants, and muttered.

"Well… that worked."

They sat in silence, watching as the world adjusted to the absence of one of its oldest powers.

Somewhere, in the empty void where Vatican City once stood, a new question was forming.

But that was a problem for later.

For now—

They had just killed God's middle management.

And it felt glorious.

MORNING
The sun rose over Rome, illuminating a city in full-blown hysteria.

The Vatican was gone.

Not damaged. Not under attack.

Just··· gone.

A gaping void sat where the seat of Catholic power had once existed.

No ruins. No rubble. Just absence.

And the world had no idea how to process it.

Rome was chaos incarnate.

✓ Polizia everywhere, cordoning off the impossible hole in the ground.
✓ Carabinieri setting up roadblocks, looking confused as hell.
✓ Vigili del Fuoco standing around, unsure what to extinguish because there was literally nothing left.
✓ Journalists from every network worldwide, scrambling for answers that did not exist.

The headlines flashed across screens:

➡ "VATICAN CITY MISSING—GOD'S FINAL JUDGMENT?"
➡ "HOLY SEE NO MORE—HAS REALITY GLITCHED?"
➡ "PAPAL VANISHING ACT: WHERE DID THE POPE GO?"

And amidst the chaos, amidst the frantic authorities, the broken theologians, the screaming news anchors…

Álvaro, Borges, and Pascal?

Enjoying cornetto e cappuccino at a quiet café like nothing had happened.
The Trio's Morning Ritual

The air smelled of fresh espresso, butter, and baked pastries.

Álvaro took a slow sip of his cappuccino, sighing contentedly.

Borges was halfway through a stolen cornetto, tail wagging lazily.

Pascal licked foam off his whiskers, glancing over at the distant chaos. "I'm just saying, I expected more fire."

Borges, munching. "More screaming, too. Honestly, this feels underwhelming."

Álvaro, flipping through a newspaper, shrugged. "Give it time. This is just the first stage of grief—denial. Wait until they hit 'anger.' That'll be fun."

Pascal flicked his tail. "So, do we even have a plan for what comes next?"

Álvaro, grinning, took another sip. "Nope."

Borges licked crumbs from his lips. "Good. Plans are overrated."

They sat in comfortable silence, letting the world spiral into an unsolvable theological crisis.

For once, they had nothing to do.

Just cornetto.

Just cappuccino.

And the knowledge that they had permanently altered history.

BACK HOME. EPILOGUE

The world adjusted.

Somehow.

The Vatican never returned. The Pope? Gone. No one knew where he went.

Rome kept moving, Italy kept cooking, and people found new ways to sin without guilt.

And Álvaro, Borges, Pascal, and Miss Petunia?

They simply went home.

Álvaro, having fully embraced his return to alcohol, was back to his peak intellectual form.

Hungover? Yes. Genius? Absolutely.

With the Vatican no longer controlling the boundaries of philosophical thought, academia suddenly needed someone who could teach students how to navigate a reality without preordained meaning.

Álvaro was hired back.

His lectures were legendary.

✓ He philosophized like a prophet who had seen beyond the veil.
✓ He dismantled entire worldviews over a single glass of whiskey.
✓ His students, enthralled, debated him like zealots at the altar of Absurdism.

And with the weight of religion gone, his rants on Kant, Heidegger, and the noumenon hit harder than ever.

While Álvaro enlightened young minds with his drunken philosophical brilliance, Borges and Pascal were spoiled rotten by his students.

✓ Borges got gourmet steaks, belly rubs, and an actual golden bowl engraved with His Excellency, the Goodest Boy.
✓ Pascal received his own miniature leather armchair, an electric self-warming cat bed, and daily tributes of tuna and cream.

The students, adoring them as mascots of absolute wisdom, treated them like holy relics from a new, post-theological world.

They had destroyed the Vatican… and ended up worshipped instead.

Then, one day—

The front door swung open.

The students gasped. Borges perked up. Pascal narrowed his eyes.

And Miss Petunia strolled in, stretching, yawning, as if she had merely taken a light afternoon nap.

"Well," she said, adjusting her shawl. "That was a nap!"

Silence.

Borges stared. "Miss Petunia… where the hell have you been?"

She waved a hand dismissively. "Oh, dear, no need to fuss. I was resting. What did I miss?"

FADE TO BLACK.

(Until next time.)

Álvaro wanted coffee, not a corpse, a conspiracy, or a dog debating metaphysics.

Pascal, the cat, remains unimpressed.

Reality unravels.

Air conditioning is involved.

None of this makes sense, and frankly, Álvaro isn't paid enough to care.